SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS:

OR,

A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

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THE SECOND EDITION.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.
Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed. Heb. i. 1, 2. ii. 1.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY T. BENSLEY;
AND SOLD BY J. MATHEWS, NO. 18, IN THE STRAND; C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY; AND BY THE BOOKSELLERS IN LEICESTER.

1793.

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS;

VOLUME THE FOURTH,

CONTAINING

THE SECOND PART

OF THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

CONTENTS.

SCRIPTURE

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 33.

Jesus delivered the parable of the marriage feast—replied to the Pharisees and Herodians, on the payment of tribute—confounded the Sadducees, by proving the resurrection—answered a Scribe, respecting the first and great commandment—baffled the Pharisees, by proposing a question about the Messiah—warned his disciples against the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he reproved and condemned in the most awful language.

"WHERE is the wise? where is the Scribe? where is the disputer of this world *?" Such were the opponents of our Lord; and in their proud and malicious contentions with him they were completely vanquished and confounded. Towards the close of his life, especially, they assailed him with all their subtlety, in order to ensnare him; but their best-concerted plans were

* 1 Cor. i. 20.

 baffled.

baffled. We know alſo, that all his adverſaries, who object to his Goſpel, though they may be thought to poſſeſs an uncommon degree of ſagacity and learning, ſhall finally be convicted of the groſſeſt folly, be ſilenced and overcome. "All that are incenſed againſt him ſhall be aſhamed *."

Tueſday in Paſſion week. Part of his audience had withdrawn, being enraged by his faithful admonitions; but he proceeded to inſtruct the reſt by a very intereſting parable †. In language ſomething ſimilar to what he had uſed on a former occaſion ‡, he repreſented the great bleſſings of the Goſpel under the deſcription of a feaſt. Plenteous proviſions, and ſuch as are moſt exquiſite in their nature, are here exhibited. They are ſufficient for the ſupply of every gueſt, and capable of yielding inexpreſſible delight. This is more than a common entertainment: it is a royal banquet; what the King of heaven has prepared for the accommodation of his creatures upon earth. It is, alſo, deſigned for the celebration of a marriage, the union of his own Son with the Church: for Jeſus is the Bridegroom of his people, having eſpouſed them to himſelf. What extenſive and unparalleled grace does this diſplay!

A numerous company had been deſired to give their attendance; but at the proper ſeaſon, when reminded of their ſovereign's expectations, they refuſed to obey his ſummons. Yet ſuch was his condeſcenſion, that after this inſult he renewed the invitation, and ſent one meſſage upon another, aſſuring them

* Iſa. xlv. 24. † Matt. xxii. 1—14. ‡ Sect. 26.

that

that his table was richly furniſhed for their reception, and requeſting their preſence without delay. Even then his kindneſs was rejected with diſdain, being conſidered as a matter not worth regarding: for "they made light of it," and turned their attention to their common occupations. Is this a natural deſcription? Are men, in general, backward to partake of a ſumptuous entertainment? Do they ſhun the opportunity of gratifying their ſenſual appetites? No: but the feaſt, here exhibited, is ſpiritual: and the contempt, with which its bleſſings are uſually refuſed, is a deciſive proof of our extreme depravity: there is ſcarcely any thing in life, which is not preferred to grace and ſalvation.

The parable further declares that the ſervants, who carried their lord's meſſages, were treated with ſcorn and violence; and that ſome of them ſuffered death. This was, exactly, what the holy prophets and Apoſtles met with from the Jewiſh nation. Jeſus, therefore, held up to his hearers a true picture of the perſecuting ſpirit, by which both they and their fathers were diſtinguiſhed. And, while he repreſented the king as utterly deſtroying his murderous ſubjects, and reducing their city to aſhes, he virtually predicted the divine judgments coming upon them, for their rejection of the Goſpel. Their fall, however, has contributed to the exaltation of others: we "have obtained mercy through their unbelief *."

The invitation to the marriage was enlarged. The ſovereign, determined that his preparations ſhould not

* Rom. xi. 30.

be ineffectual, called in the ſtrangers and miſerable outcaſts upon the highways, till the feaſt was furniſhed with gueſts. Thus the Lord God has ſent the glad tidings of ſalvation to ſinners of the Gentiles, even to thoſe, who through their ignorance and profaneneſs ſeem at the greateſt diſtance, and in a ſtate the moſt deplorably wretched. The miniſters of the Goſpel are now commiſſioned to "bid to the marriage, as many as they ſhall find." Whatever, then, may have been your character or condition, we entreat your attendance, and aſſure you, that the Lord will graciouſly receive you. O refuſe not, as others have done to their perdition!

But if you accept the invitation, you muſt comply with the rules preſcribed, and be properly habited, while you ſit down to this entertainment: for "a wedding garment" is provided for the gueſts. God himſelf propoſes to "cover you with the robe of righteouſneſs," which will render you beautiful in his ſight: you cannot, indeed, ſtand in his preſence without it. He will minutely ſurvey the perſons, who profeſs a readineſs to partake of his feaſt. Let all the outward members of his Church attentively conſider that ſcrutiny, which He makes. One is repreſented as ſingled out from the reſt, being deſtitute of the veſtment required on the occaſion, and commanded by the Lord of the aſſembly. He was called forth and examined concerning his pretenſions to be admitted to that high banquet, and, having nothing to urge in his own defence, was caſt out with extreme diſgrace. The all-piercing eye of God will detect every hypocrite, who may be numbered

among

among his people. It is not enough to join the aſſemblies of the ſaints: have we "put on Chriſt?" If we are unwilling to appear in his righteouſneſs, and preſume upon our own worthineſs, we cannot be acceptable gueſts: nor can we eſcape conviction. "How cameſt thou in hither?" is a queſtion, which will confound thouſands, who ſeemed to pay a reſpect to the Goſpel. What, then, is our habit? Are we "clothed with the garment of ſalvation?" If otherwiſe, an awful condemnation awaits us: we muſt be excluded from God and happineſs, and conſigned to a place of endleſs and inexpreſſible torment, anguiſh, and deſpair. Ah! what "ſearchings of heart" become us, ſince few, in compariſon, obtain the efficacious influence of that grace, which is tendered to them in the Goſpel!

Theſe ſolemn admonitions of Jeſus did not conciliate, but rather the more exaſperate, his enemies. Yet they were afraid to take away his life by force, and, therefore, by various ſchemes endeavoured to find ſome plauſible pretext for doing it. Accordingly, they propoſed ſubtle queſtions, merely that they might draw from him ſuch anſwers, as would furniſh them with a heavy charge againſt him. The Phariſees left him, and, having conſulted together on the beſt method of effecting their deſign, joined the Herodians, in laying a ſnare for him *. Theſe men were of different parties and principles, and yet they could agree in the ſame diabolical purpoſe. They came with fair, but feigned, profeſſions of re-

* Matt. xxii. 15—22. Mark xii. 13—17. Luke xx. 20—26.

gard, and requeſted our Lord's deciſion, as to the lawfulneſs of paying tribute to Ceſar, the Roman Emperor. Probably, they were confident of involving him in a very ſerious difficulty: if he had diſſuaded them from ſubmitting to the tax, they might have accuſed him as an enemy to the government; or, if he had commanded it, they might have incenſed the people againſt him, as hoſtile to their liberties.

But how vain are all human devices, in oppoſition to God! Jeſus perceived their malevolent intentions, and ſharply reproved their hypocriſy. He replied with peculiar wiſdom, ſo as to make them judge and condemn themſelves in their own cauſe. They were forced to confeſs their ſubjection to Ceſar, ſo long as they received the current coin, which was ſtamped with that Emperor's image. He inferred therefore, without entering into political debates, that they ſhould "render to Ceſar the things which were Ceſar's." A concluſion undeniably juſt: and equally juſt was the caution, which he ſubjoined, that God alſo has demands upon us, which ought, at leaſt, to be as much regarded and complied with, as thoſe of our earthly governors. They were aſtoniſhed at the prudence and propriety of this anſwer, and obliged for that time to abandon their purpoſe.

Let us, then, attend to our Lord's deciſion, and ſeriouſly conſider what we owe both to God and the king. Theſe duties are not incompatible with each other: we cannot plead, that we truly "fear God," if we do not "honour the king." Are we giving

him that reverence and ſupport, which are due to his ſtation and authority? Do we utter contemptuous ſpeeches againſt the magiſtrate? Do we liſten with pleaſure to the debates of ſedition? Do we ſtudy fraudulent methods of evading the taxes, which are impoſed, or pay them with a peeviſh diſcontent? Surely, ſuch a conduct is as repugnant as diſgraceful to the profeſſion of religion. But, though we have maintained our loyalty and ſubmiſſion to the reigning powers, have we not neglected the God of heaven? Has He no rights, no claims upon us? Or, ſhall we preſume, that he will not aſſert them? "Will a man rob God?" Would not the attempt imply conſummate ignorance, pride, and fool-hardineſs? Yet we all have done it. We have not admired his perfections, honoured his government, obeyed his law, or believed in his Goſpel, as we ought. We have not rendered all proper reverence and attention to his name, his ſabbaths, his houſe, or miniſters. "Enter not into judgment with thy ſervants, O Lord!"

On the ſame day, a different ſet of men attacked the Saviour *. The Sadducees, who denied a future ſtate, came and ſtarted a difficulty againſt the reſurrection of the body, which they ridiculed. They urged, that ſeven brethren, having been married in ſucceſſion to the ſame woman, could not all claim her as their wife in the world to come. But Jeſus declared, that their opinions evinced an ignorance of the ſcriptures, and of the mighty power of God; ſince that power can eaſily reſtore life to the dead, however improbable

* Matt. xxii. 23—33. Mark xii. 18—27. Luke xx. 27—40.

the event may ſeem, and the ſcriptures expreſsly aſſert, that they ſhall riſe. He argued, that all the diſtinctions and relations, which ſubſiſt among us on earth, will have no place hereafter. There may be a knowledge of thoſe, to whom we are now cloſely united; but all thoſe partial attachments and connections, which bind us to one another, will then be done away, as inconſiſtent with the perfection of the heavenly ſtate. Their objection, therefore, fell to the ground. He ſhewed alſo, even from the books of Moſes, which they profeſſed to receive, that Jehovah had evidently given intimations of a future ſtate, by calling himſelf the God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, long after thoſe patriarchs were deceaſed: we may thence conclude, that departed ſaints are not periſhed: but that, as God is their God, their ſpirits are now with him, and their duſt ſhall awake again, to live in his preſence for ever. Thus they were completely vanquiſhed, and dared not to renew their attack.

Do not modern free-thinkers, like the ancient Sadducees, betray their ignorance and perverſeneſs by the difficulties which they ſtart on the ſubject of religion? We would, therefore, addreſs them in the words of Jeſus, "Ye do err, not knowing the ſcriptures, nor the power of God." We entreat you to relinquiſh your ſpeculations, which will certainly turn to your confuſion. To be poſſeſſed of a captious diſpoſition and a fondneſs for diſpute, is accounted, in the eſtimate of reaſon, no mark of wiſdom or humility. It is eaſy to propoſe, what the moſt intelligent cannot

cannot resolve, and to perplex, what human ingenuity cannot unravel. Such cavilling may furnish amusement to your fancy, and adulation to your pride. But, while you refuse to hear the simple declarations of God's word, and oppose to them your own arrogant decisions, you exalt yourselves above your Maker, and (such will ever be the doom of the proud deceiver) you will perish in your vain imaginations.

But, though the Sadducees declined the contest with Jesus, the Pharisees still renewed it, as if they were confident of succeeding better*. One of their learned doctors came forward with a question, intending to try his knowledge of divine revelation. It seems to have been disputed among them, which was the most important and necessary precept: some preferred ceremonies, and others sacrifices, while the generality paid little regard to that extensive holiness, which is indispensably required. Upon this point, therefore, the Scribe appealed to Jesus, and obtained a decisive answer. The Saviour discovered at once a complete understanding of the sacred law in its full import, while he declared, that its grand demand is love; love the most ardent, of which we are capable, to the one supreme Jehovah, and love for the whole human species, as sincere as that which we feel for ourselves. The Jewish doctor perceived and acknowledged the excellence of this reply, and joined in asserting, that the principle of obedience, which our Lord laid down, was far more valuable and acceptable to God, than all ceremonial observances or expensive sacrifices. It ap-

* Matt. xxii. 3[illegible], &c. Mark xii. 28—37. Luke xx. 41—44.

peared,

peared, then, that the Scribe, though he had come with an improper temper, poſſeſſed more conſiſtent ſentiments of divine truth, than were uſually found among the Pharifees, and ſuch as tended to lead him to an unfeigned acceptance of the Goſpel. On this ground, Jeſus commended the ſolidity of his judgment, and conſidered him as promiſing fair for the kingdom of God. What the event was, we are not told.

The ſubject, here propoſed, is highly intereſting: have we attended to it? Do we underſtand, what is of main importance in religion? Are we aware of the extenſive and ſpiritual nature of God's moral law? Do we approve and admire its precepts, as "holy, and juſt, and good?" Do we live under the influence of that ſacred principle of love, which is required in preference to every thing beſides, and without which nothing can be pleaſing to God? It is, indeed, the ſum and ſubſtance of all thoſe duties, which the inſpired writers have inculcated, and is properly called "the fulfilling of the law*." Every tranſgreſſion ſhews a defect of this diſpoſition; for, if it maintained an entire and conſtant aſcendancy, it would certainly lead to the full perfection of obedience. But our failure is continual, and of lamentable obliquity. Our deſires and affections, if examined by this teſt, will every day convict us of guilt. We come far ſhort of that regard, which we owe both to God and man; and nothing which we can poſſibly plead, will compenſate the want of it.

* Rom. xiii. 10.

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The Pharifees ftill furrounded our Lord, and probably meditated a frefh attack. But he, the more completely to baffle and confound them, propofed a queftion, and called upon them to declare their opinion of the extraction of Meffiah, whom they profeffed to look for. He ftarted a difficulty from their own fcriptures, which they could not refolve. They were agreed, that the Chrift, the promifed Saviour, muft be "the Son of David;" and they could not deny, that David, under the influence of the Holy Ghoft, fpeaks of him as his Lord *. When urged, therefore, to explain, in what fenfe he could be the Son, and yet the Lord, of David, they could not reply. They felt themfelves overpowered, and relinquifhed their vain difputations, though they ftill retained all their malevolence.

To us, alfo, the inquiry may be addreffed, and an important one it is, "What think ye of Chrift?" Have you formed confiftent and fcriptural fentiments of his perfon and defcent? Or, how do you remove the difficulty, as it is here ftated? If it be admitted, that Chrift is very God, as well as very man, the feeming abfurdity and contradiction is done away. In his human nature, he is "the Son of David, according to the flefh;" but, by a divine nature only, he is "David's Lord." Thus he ftyles himfelf "The root and the offspring of David †." But if we reprefent him as no more than a creature like ourfelves, and as having no higher original than earthly parents, the whole is ftrange and incongruous. The queftion

* Pfalm cx. 1. † Rev. xxii. 16.

will

will ſtill recur, and cannot be anſwered, "How doth David in Spirit call him Lord?" If we abide by the plain and expreſs declarations of the Bible, we ſhall readily allow, that Jeſus is "Immanuel," "God manifeſted in the fleſh:" no other doctrine will reconcile the various paſſages, which relate to him. And this important poſition being eſtabliſhed, we may rejoice and triumph, as it lays a ſecure and immovable foundation for our hope towards God.

Jeſus continued through the day to teach, admoniſh, and reprove. Addreſſing himſelf to his diſciples, in the audience of all the people, he ſolemnly warned them to beware of the pride and hypocriſy of the Scribes and Phariſees, whom he ſeverely condemned. The ſentence and the language were ſimilar to thoſe on a former occaſion, of awful and impreſſive import*: "As far as they ſpeak to you in God's name, and agreeably to his word, they demand your reſpect and obedience. But their conduct is inconſiſtent with their own inſtructions: be therefore afraid of being miſled by their pernicious examples. They aſſume an appearance of great ſanctity, and ſcrupulouſly practiſe many religious ceremonies; but they act, throughout, from the baſeſt principles; their only aim is to gain the notice and applauſe of men. Their oſtentation and vain-glory are deteſtable, while they affect ſuch diſtinctions and titles, as lead the people to compliment their piety and learning. But you, my diſciples, muſt be far different, not taking to yourſelves

* Matt. xxiii. 1, &c. Mark xii. 38—40. Luke xx. 45, &c. See Sect. 24.

any

any ſtate, or courting appellations of honour and precedency. You muſt live as brethren, who have but one Father and one Maſter, and be willing to ſubmit to the meaneſt office, exhibiting a pattern of lowlineſs and ſelf-abaſement. Such a temper is indiſpenſably requiſite, ſince God will confound the man, who ſhall dare to exalt himſelf; and He will favour none but the humble."

Have we, then, attended to the exhortation, which equally concerns all the followers of Jeſus? Do we poſſeſs that meekneſs of ſpirit, ſo eſſential to the Chriſtian character? Are there no proud contentions among us for ſuperiority of rank? And do we cheerfully condeſcend and ſtoop to our inferiors, for their benefit? Or again, while we pay a due reſpect to thoſe in higher life, do we reverence God and our conſcience above all? Do we remember, as we ought, that we are accountable, not to men, but to God, who "ſearcheth the heart," and that "one is our Maſter, even Chriſt?"

When Jeſus had delivered theſe cautions, he turned himſelf to the Scribes and Phariſees, who ſtill, probably, expected to find ſome ground of accuſation againſt him. He then addreſſed them with peculiar majeſty, and as one inveſted with ſovereign authority. In the capacity of their Judge, he arraigned, he convicted them, and, for their ſecret iniquity, pronounced upon them the heavieſt condemnation. From one ſentence to another, each containing a diſcovery of their wickedneſs and a memorial of their folly, we hear, in awful and prophetic repetition, the word of warning and tremendous

tremendous denunciation, breaking ſorth from his lips. Yet who ſhall blame the intimations of judgment? Who ſhall wonder, that the cry was "Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees?" Let us read the long, black roll of their offences: let us mark the charges, brought by their unprejudiced accuſer.

They diſcovered an obſtinate and malevolent oppoſition to the Goſpel, not only rejecting it themſelves, but, with a furious bigotry, preventing others from receiving it. They practiſed the moſt cruel oppreſſions, even upon the widow and the fatherleſs, and yet covered their injuſtice with a ſhew of uncommon ardour in devotion. Their pretences to religion rendered their extortion the more deteſtable; and therefore Jeſus declared, that their boaſted prayers would aggravate their damnation. They ſhewed great zeal to gain proſelytes, not for the glory of God, but their own reputation; and they were ſo earneſt to confirm each convert in error and hatred of the truth, as to make his caſe more deplorable and hopeleſs than that of his ſeducer. They endeavoured by ſpecious arguments and curious diſtinctions to juſtify their profane uſe of oaths, as if they might be allowed to ſwear in certain forms of ſpeech, and contracted not any high degree of guilt by falſifying their ſolemn affirmations. But Jeſus convicted them of horrid impiety and perjury, while he aſſerted, that ſuch appeals to the temple, and the altar, as they pleaded for, were no other than appeals to God himſelf.

They paid a ſcrupulous attention to ſome trifles, which exalted their reputation, but neglected the moſt

moſt important and neceſſary duties. Their religious zeal was confined to external obſervances: they ſought not real purity of heart. They were ſatisfied with ſo much of the appearance of ſanctity, as would procure them admiration among the people, while their vile affections expoſed them to the contempt and indignation of that righteous God, to whom all their ſecret iniquity lay open.

They pretended a high veneration for thoſe holy men, whom their fathers had murdered. But, though they profeſſed to honour deceaſed ſaints by building and adorning their ſepulchres, they perſecuted the living, and thus proved that they inherited the ſame violent hatred of genuine piety, as their anceſtors. Jeſus, therefore, declared, that by their continued progreſs in wickedneſs, they would ſoon fill up their meaſure, and be ripe for deſtruction. So obdurate were they, that he conſidered them as on the brink of final perdition, ready to ſink down into "the damnation of hell." Yet further means were to be tried with them. Apoſtles and other miniſters were to be ſent among them, to bear witneſs of the truth: but our Lord predicted, that, by their cruel and ſanguinary oppoſition to thoſe his honoured ſervants, they would provoke God more and more, till at length he ſhould ariſe to take exemplary vengeance upon that very generation, and reckon with them for all the righteous blood, which had been ſhed from the beginning of the world.

How deplorable was their caſe! Jeſus, being deeply affected at the proſpect of their approaching miſeries, broke forth into a pathetic lamentation. They were

the ſame accents of pity, by which he had twice before expreſſed the yearnings of his bowels *. From this part of his conduct it appears, that, though he pronounced the moſt tremendous woes, judgment is "his ſtrange work." He bewailed the murderous city, which had long been the ſeat of perſecution, and which had ſcornfully reſiſted all his efforts of love for the ſalvation of her children. He would have cheriſhed and protected them, as a hen her tender brood; but they had obſtinately rejected his gracious propoſals. At laſt, therefore, inſulted mercy was about to be withdrawn and give place to unrelenting juſtice: and that hand, which had been long ſtretched out with offers of richeſt bleſſings, was ſoon to be lifted up with a rod of indignation to deſolate their country, and deſtroy them for ever. Thus Jeſus took a ſolemn farewel of the temple, to return no more: he warned the impenitent ſinners around him, and predicted, that at his future advent they would acknowledge his divine character, and be glad to join in thoſe acclamations of praiſe, which had lately been forbidden in that houſe, ſaying, "Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

What ſolemn things are theſe! Surely, if they are ſeriouſly regarded, they muſt leave a deep impreſſion upon our minds. Let us, then, make the application to ourſelves, rather than to the ancient Phariſees.

1. A ſtriking exhibition is here given of the character of Jeſus. Behold, how tender his compaſſion, how extenſive his grace! He ſeeks after thoſe, who

* Sect. 25. and 31.

are

are ready to periſh, and, with repeated and importunate ſolicitations, entreats them to hide themſelves "under the ſhadow of his wings," where alone they can be ſafe and happy. O why are we unwilling to accept his offers? Let us alſo remark, how ſtrict are his proceedings, when "he lays judgment to the line." How terrible the effects of his anger! Who, then, ſhall preſume to contend with Him? If we refuſe to honour him by our unfeigned compliance, he will glorify himſelf in our everlaſting deſtruction.

2. Let not the faithful miniſters of Chriſt be reproached, for endeavouring, like their Lord and Maſter, to admoniſh and reprove their careleſs hearers. In performing that painful part of their office, they do not aſſume the authority of a judge: but if, as the mouth of God, they ſhould declare his whole will without reſerve, they muſt denounce vengeance, as well as proclaim mercy. From the example of Jeſus, we ſee that this is conſiſtent with the exerciſe of perfect compaſſion and meekneſs. And ſhall you charge with uncharitableneſs and pride thoſe, who "watch for your ſouls," becauſe they think themſelves bound to addreſs the wicked, even in the very ſtrong language of the Saviour, "How can ye eſcape the damnation of hell?"

3. Let us ſeriouſly examine our own character. What is our ſtate? What our expectation? Do we not, in ſome reſpect or other, betray a temper or conduct, ſimilar to that of the Phariſees? Much we have heard of their hypocriſy: let us fear to put on, as they did, a profeſſion of piety "for a cloke of maliciouſneſs;"

licioufnefs;" this would be more deteftable, than avowed infidelity. Yet let not pure religion be laid afide, becaufe we abhor the vile diffimulation of thofe, who have nothing but a fair appearance. Some are vehement in their invectives againft the men, who "for a pretence make long prayers," while they themfelves never pray at all. Thefe perfons may not come under the condemnation of Pharifees, but they fhall not efcape the judgment of God for their impiety. And, if they perifh for ever, it will be no comfort to them, that others are fuffering a ftill greater degree of torment.

O let us welcome the Saviour, while we adopt that expreffive acclamation, "Bleffed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;" that "when he fhall appear," the fecond time, "we may have confidence, and not be afhamed before him at his coming*!" Amen.

* 1 John ii. 28.

SECT. 34.

Jesus commended the liberality of a poor widow—predicted the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the various signs and circumstances attending it—foretold, also, his coming to judgment, and exhorted to watchfulness.

JESUS, having pronounced a tremendous sentence upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and declared that "their house was left unto them desolate," withdrew from that beautiful edifice, in which they gloried as their brightest ornament and surest defence. He departed from the temple to return no more.

Yet, before he went out, he paused, and remarked the readiness with which the various worshippers cast their money into the treasury, for the necessary expenses of the divine service*. Many opulent persons contributed much; but he fixed his eyes upon a poor widow, while she was throwing in her two mites, and pointed her out to his disciples as an object of his peculiar regard. He knew her straitened circumstances; he saw and approved the inward principle of her heart. The value of her oblation was trifling, but it included the whole of her little property. Our Lord, therefore,

* Mark xii. 41, &c. Luke xxi. 1—4.

reprefented her liberality as more enlarged and more acceptable to God, than the coftly offerings of the wealthy, who had given up only a fmall part of their fuperfluity, and ftill retained every enjoyment as before. We learn from this fhort narration, that it is incumbent upon all to communicate, according to their ability, for the advancement of religion, as well as for the relief of the afflicted; that fuch as are indigent are not excufed from the duty; and that He, "by whom actions are weighed," will commend and recompenfe the leaft donations which fpring from faith and love.

Jefus was leaving the temple, when his difciples took the opportunity of remarking to him the extent and magnificence of the building, fuppofing, probably, that he would exprefs his admiration*. But he turned off their attention from the confideration of its grandeur to that of its approaching demolition, when not one ftone fhould remain upon another. He then retired to the mount of Olives, which afforded him a profpect of the facred edifice; and while he fat there, perhaps contemplating the deftruction which he had foretold, fome of his Apoftles enquired privately, how foon his prophecies would be fulfilled, and what particular fignals would precede the great events. His reply to the queftion contains various circumftantial predictions, which, when compared with their exact accomplifhment, furnifh the ftrongeft evidence in fupport of the Gofpel, and ftand as an impregnable barrier againft the affaults of infidelity. He addreffed his difciples to the following purpofe:

* Matt. xxiv. 1, &c. Mark xiii. 1, &c. Luke xxi. 5, &c.

"It

"It is neceſſary for you to be upon your guard againſt vain pretenders; for many impoſtors ſhall ariſe, aſſuming the name and character of the Meſſiah, and affecting to ſet up his kingdom. Dreadful commotions and diſtreſſes, alſo, ſhall be permitted, before the appointed deſolation of the Jews; but you ought not, on that account, to be terrified or ſurpriſed. You will hear of the alarms of war, ſeditions, famines, peſtilences, and earthquakes; and tremendous appearances ſhall be ſeen in the air: yet, awful as theſe may be, they are intended only as preſages of far ſeverer calamities."

"You, my beloved friends, will ſtand in need of a peculiar degree of courage. For, previous to thoſe national judgments, the moſt violent perſecutions ſhall be raiſed againſt you; ſo that you may expect, in my ſervice, univerſal hatred, ſtripes, impriſonment, and death itſelf. Hereby, indeed, an honour will be conferred upon you. While you are called to anſwer for yourſelves, you will have the opportunity of bearing witneſs to the truth before kings and rulers of the earth, and evincing the excellence of your principles. You may tremble, perhaps, under an apprehenſion, that, becauſe you are deſtitute of learning and eloquence, you ſhall not be able to vindicate my Goſpel, as you ought, and may therefore be confounded in the preſence of your judges. But you need not be anxious on this account, ſince the Holy Ghoſt will ſupport you, and furniſh you with proper arguments and words: and I pledge myſelf to give you ſuch utterance and wiſdom, as ſhall render you ſuperior to all the ſubtlety and power of your enemies."

"This fierce oppoſition to my cauſe will ſtagger many of its profeſſed friends, and induce them to deſert it. Through the fear of perſecution, they will apoſtatiſe from the truth, and betray their neareſt relations, who ſtedfaſtly maintain it; ſo that one brother ſhall treacherouſly deliver up another to the hand of violence, the father his ſon, the children their parents. What, then, have you to look for, but general contempt and abhorrence? Yet a peculiar protection, extending even to your minuteſt concerns, ſhall be afforded you; in dependence upon which, you may poſſeſs an unſhaken firmneſs and compoſure of mind."

"Many falſe teachers, alſo, ſhall ariſe, and ſpread deſtructive errors: and, through the prevalence of iniquity, not a few of thoſe, who have ſhewn much love for my name, ſhall decline from their ſpirituality and zeal. In the midſt of ſuch difficulties, you may be perplexed and ready to abandon my ſervice: but I exhort you to perſevere through all extremities, having reſpect to the glorious recompenſe of reward, which is ſet before you. For your encouragement, I aſſure you that your word ſhall not be ineffectual, and that by your means, weak as you are, the Goſpel of my grace ſhall be promulgated from kingdom to kingdom, and make its way againſt all oppoſition, to every nation of the known world. After that event the end ſhall come; the Jewiſh ſtate ſhall be concluded, the city and temple laid in ruins, and both the civil and eccleſiaſtical polity totally deſtroyed."

"There are, likewiſe, nearer ſigns, and certain attendant circumſtances of this approaching devaſtation, which

which you will carefully remark. According to Daniel's prophecy*, you will ſee the Roman armies (properly called "the abomination of deſolation," as being deteſtable for their idolatry, and as laying waſte all before them) erecting their ſtandards upon the holy ground, and inveſting Jeruſalem. Let this be conſidered as a ſignal, that you muſt immediately quit the place, which is about to be demoliſhed, and retreat to the mountainous part of the country, for the preſervation of your lives. Without regarding your ſubſtance, or even your apparel, fly upon the very firſt notice, with the utmoſt haſte; or you will periſh in the general calamity. Theſe troubles will be peculiarly diſtreſſing: they will be fraught with woe to pregnant women, and to the mother, whoſe tender infant ſtill hangs upon her breaſt. Do you, alſo, pray, that your departure may not happen in the winter, and that the day of your flight may not be the ſabbath. The former would add new hazards to your eſcape, and new horrors to your baniſhment; whilſt the latter, in its neceſſity, would diſturb that ſacred, invaluable reſt, and aggravate the griefs of the fugitive from Zion and Jeruſalem."

"As to this unhappy people, who are devoted to deſtruction, their caſe will be moſt deplorable indeed. For the afflictions, which await them, will be extreme, far ſurpaſſing every inſtance that has yet been known, or that ſhall occur again. A moſt tremendous ſlaughter ſhall take place among them; and thoſe, who eſcape the edge of the ſword, ſhall be diſperſed, in a ſtate of wretched captivity, among all the nations of the world.

* Dan. ix. 26.

Their well-fortified city ſhall be razed to its very foundations, and remain in the poſſeſſion of the Gentiles, till God's appointed time for the triumph of the Gentiles ſhall be completed.' Should the horrid carnage and devaſtation continue long, the whole Jewiſh race would be quite extirpated. But God, who ſtill retains a purpoſe of mercy towards them, will preſerve them as a ſeparate people; agreeably to that declaration, 'Deſtroy it not,' for a bleſſing is in it*."

"During theſe troubles, many deceivers will ariſe, and, under the aſſumed character of the Meſſiah, promiſe deliverance. By ſpecious arts and uncommon operations, they will obtain much credit; and, if the grace of God did not prevent, they would even pervert from the truth my choſen followers. But you are required to take heed; and theſe my predictions may be the means of your ſecurity. Be not, therefore, induced to join any vain pretenders; for the calamities which I have foretold, are unavoidable. The Son of Man will come, as he hath ſaid,' like the lightning, which is ſudden and terrible in its appearance, and irreſiſtible in its effects. He will come, as in flaming fire, to plead the cauſe of his Goſpel, and to inflict exemplary vengeance on his enemies. Under his commiſſion, the Roman ſoldiers, bearing the eagle on their ſtandards, ſhall fly to the deſtruction of this devoted nation, as the devouring eagles to their prey. The awful deſolation ſhall, alſo, be attended, even as my final advent, with many ſurpriſing ſights in the heavens, and with great commotions, anguiſh, and terror upon the earth."

* Iſa. lxv. 8.

Before

Before we proceed further with our Lord's folemn admonitions, let us paufe awhile, and ferioufly meditate on thefe prophecies, fo exprefs and circumftantial, as to deferve our moft earneft regard. They are fo ftrong, as to be fufficient of themfelves, were there no other evidence, to prove the truth of the Gofpel. If the events have not anfwered thefe defcriptions, then may Jefus be rejected as a bafe impoftor, and his whole fyftem of doctrine derided, as no better than an artful fiction. But, if indeed what he minutely foretold has been exactly accomplifhed, what fhall we fay? Can there a doubt remain, concerning his miffion, or the refpect which is due to him?

It is generally allowed, that thofe effects, which are clearly and undeniably miraculous, when produced in fupport of any pofition, are a full and inconteftable confirmation of it. Now prophecies are no other than miracles, perhaps the moft ftriking, which can poffibly be exhibited. To predict future events, which lie beyond the reach of conjecture, and which at the time appear highly improbable; to do this in a circumftantial manner, is as wonderful, and as plainly fhews a divine interpofition, as opening the eyes of the blind, or raifing the dead to life. Yet this is what the Saviour has done. Nay, he has delivered fuch prophecies, as yet continue to be fulfilled among ourfelves. Thefe, therefore, are like a ftanding miracle, and afford us a ftronger atteftation of his Gofpel, than even thofe were favoured with, who both faw and heard him.

He declared, as we have remarked upon the fubject before us, many things which were unlikely to take place,

place, and which he could not have pointed out by any human acutenefs or penetration. They were, alfo, moft offenfive to the people around him, and fuch, therefore, as impoftors, whofe grand aim is to conciliate favour, would never have afferted. Nor is the application of his words doubtful: they are fo exprefs and particular, as to feem more like a hiftory of the paft, than a prediction of the future. In confirmation of this remark, we appeal to thofe, who have related the facts as they really happened. Jofephus, a Jewifh writer, is in this view one of the ftrongeft advocates for Chriftianity. He was prefent in the Roman camp at the deftruction of Jerufalem, an eye witnefs of the defolations of the fiege and the capture; and his account fo exactly verifies our Lord's declarations, as to furnifh the beft comment upon them. We might conclude, that the hiftorian himfelf was raifed up and preferved by the providence of God, on purpofe to atteft the truth of the Gofpel, even contrary to his own intentions.

It would be unfuitable to our contracted plan to produce large extracts from different authors, in fupport of the words of Chrift, or to give a diftinct expofition of the Evangelifts. But it may be proper to fix our regard on a few remarkable particulars, which correfpond to the predictions before us.

The temple of Jerufalem has been deftroyed by the very people, whom our Lord mentioned. Yet that event was unlikely, confidering the peace which then fubfifted, and the ftrength of the fortrefs, which was generally thought impregnable. The Romans did not

wiſh to demoliſh the holy citadel: the commander iſſued out his orders and laboured earneſtly to preſerve it; and when he found his own ſchemes baffled, he was ſo ſtruck, as to declare, that the Jews muſt be under the avenging hand of God.* All the preceding and attendant circumſtances, alſo, fell out as Jeſus had deſcribed; ſuch as ſeditions, famines, earthquakes, eclipſes, meteors, a comet which reſembled a flaming ſword hanging over Jeruſalem, and contending armies in the air: ſuch alſo, were the immenſe ſlaughter of the Jews, and the entire ſubjection of thoſe, who ſurvived the maſſacre. The bare relation of the extreme diſtreſs and anguiſh, univerſally felt on that melancholy occaſion, would be enough to draw tears of compaſſion from the moſt obdurate enemy.

The remarkable deliverance of the Chriſtians, likewiſe, fulfilled our Lord's words. For many of them, obſerving the appointed ſignal, fled from the devoted city, and were reſcued from deſtruction. They were ſeparated, as the Iſraelites from the midſt of the Egyptians; and "their lives were given unto them for a prey."

The very rapid propagation of the Goſpel, which was preached in all the principal nations of the known world before Jeruſalem was taken, is another ſtriking fact, which proves that Jeſus is a true prophet. Chriſtian churches were very early planted in various kingdoms upon the ruins of idolatry; which muſt have previouſly appeared utterly improbable, and can be aſcribed only to the divine interpoſition. A doctrine, very oppoſite to men's carnal affections, and ſtriking at

the root of all the religions then eſtabliſhed, made its way with ſurpriſing energy, in ſpite of all human wiſdom and power, which were employed to oppoſe it. The inſtruments, alſo, of accompliſhing this work, were in themſelves ſo weak and contemptible, as to ſhew that their ſucceſs was miraculous. They were indeed, as their Lord foretold, univerſally hated and perſecuted, beyond any other people, for their ſyſtem of faith; yet they prevailed. What, then, ſhall we ſay? Does not ſuch a victory, ſuch a completion of an expreſs prophecy, furniſh a ſtrong argument for the truth and authority of the Goſpel?

In the ſame view, we appeal to the diſperſion of the Jews. Their city and temple were laid in ruins, and their frequent attempts to rebuild them have turned to their greater confuſion. Julian, the Roman Emperor, encouraging them to it, was ſeveral times baffled in his profane purpoſe by the eruption of balls of fire from the earth, which conſumed the artificers and their materials. No other reaſon can be given than this, that God will not ſuffer the declaration of his Son to fail, "Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles," for a determined ſeaſon. We ſee the Jews unable to recover the holy land, ſcattered over the face of the earth, and for above ſeventeen hundred years deprived of the true exerciſe of their ancient religion. Even now, in their beſt circumſtances, they enjoy but the precarious toleration of that which remains, and are united in no form of civil government. Contemplating their deſtitute condition, and their want of almoſt all the common bonds of union, we wonder that they

are ſtill a ſeparate people, and ſtill preſerved. Moſt other ancient nations are long ſince extinct, their poſterity being mixed and loſt in the general maſs of mankind. But the Jews incorporate with no others; they remain perfectly unconnected with the various communities, where they are permitted to dwell, and are as ſo many witneſſes of the truth both of the old and new Teſtament, for they have fulfilled the prophecies of both.

From theſe ſcriptures we are likewiſe led to expect their future reſtoration, which is as clearly foretold as their diſperſion. We have every reaſon, therefore, to believe, that it ſhall certainly be accompliſhed, when " the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Indeed, the Jews ſeem to be preſerved in their preſent diſtinct ſtate, for that very end: and, whenever their return ſhall take place, it will introduce a greater enlargement of the Church, than has ever yet been known. " For if the caſting away of them be the reconciling of the world; what ſhall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead* ?"

Yet, while we mourn for the preſent blindneſs of Iſrael, let us be ſolicitous for ourſelves, that we may not deſpiſe and reject the Saviour, as they have done. We trace the whole of their unparalleled calamities to that one ſin: and is it not as offenſive to God in us, as in the Jews? Will it not infallibly bring down upon us his fierce indignation? Can we be ſo infatuated, as to ſhew a contempt for the Goſpel, while we behold

* Rom. xi. 15.

that devoted nation marked out by the curſe of God for this very reaſon? And may we not fear, that many readers, with an external profeſſion of Chriſtianity, do not pay a ſerious regard to the great Prophet of our God, but make light of all his gracious propoſals? Shall you, then, eſcape for your iniquity? He, "whom man deſpiſeth, whom the nation abhorreth," cometh to devour his adverſaries, by a deſtruction infinitely more tremendous than that of Jeruſalem. And, if you continue to reſiſt him, how will you "abide the day of his coming? how will you ſtand, when he appeareth?"

Of that his final advent, and the awful ſolemnities attending it, our Lord proceeded to warn his diſciples, after having deſcribed his appearance to take vengeance on the Jewiſh nation. He was evidently led from the conſideration of one event to that of the other: and, many of the concomitant circumſtances being exactly ſimilar, we may be the leſs ſurpriſed at the difficulty of deciding, to which ſome of his expreſſions are to be referred. They may be true of both; or they may be applicable to one in a lower, and to the other in a more exalted meaning. Nor ſhould this be objected to, as it is perfectly agreeable to the language of prophecy, eſpecially when any occurrence is repreſented as the ſign or earneſt of ſomething more remote *. In ſuch caſes the tranſition is frequently made, before

* "Una eademque oratio, diſpari ſenſu accepta, plures ſimul eventus, disjunctos tempore, natura diſſimiles, deſignat."

Lowth De ſacra poeſi Hebr. Prælect. xi. See alſo Bp. Hurd's Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies.

we

we are aware; and the former ſubject reſumed, which ſeemed for awhile to be dropped.

The deſtruction of Jeruſalem is a pledge to us of the future judgment. As the Jewiſh polity was totally ſubverted immediately after the calamities mentioned above, ſo Jeſus reminds us that he will come quickly, to put an end to the preſent frame and ſyſtem of things. When all thoſe preceding diſpenſations, which are predicted, ſhall be fully accompliſhed, the whole fabric of this viſible creation ſhall be ſhaken, and He will appear in the clouds of heaven with glorious majeſty. While every eye ſhall ſee him, an inexpreſſible conſternation ſhall take place among all the families of the earth, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand ſhall be confounded at his preſence. A ſeparation ſhall then be made. As he reſcued his faithful diſciples from the Jewiſh devaſtation, ſo he will be mindful of all his choſen people, and preſerve them amidſt the terrors of the laſt day. He will commiſſion his Angels to gather them together, and conduct them to glory. O joyful hour to them, who are redeemed to God from the earth! You, who have fled for refuge to the Saviour, may welcome his approach, and rejoice at thoſe awful events, which will haſten the conſummation of your bliſs. In the proſpect of it, you may look up with triumphant exultation, for it will not be long delayed.

Jeſus obſerved to his diſciples, that, as they conſidered the firſt budding of the trees an intimation of the return of ſummer, ſo they might judge from the hints which he gave them, when the important change was drawing nigh. He aſſured them, that the holy city

city ſhould be deſtroyed, before that generation ſhould be extinct; and accordingly, in about forty years it was totally demoliſhed. He declared, alſo, that, though the whole frame of the material world ſhall periſh, not one particle of his prophecies ſhall fail. The final diſſolution, then, of all things will certainly take place; but the preciſe time is not revealed, for it remains a deep and unſearchable ſecret in the mind of the eternal Father. Yet, if no ſuch particular warnings be afforded us of the laſt day, as of the deſolation of Judea, we ſhould be continually looking forwards to it, with the utmoſt awe and ſolemnity of mind.

According to our Lord's admonition, his appearance, whenſoever it ſhall be, will be ſudden and terrible: as the flood ſwept away the generation of Noah, he will ſurpriſe and deſtroy many in the midſt of their worldly occupations and ſenſual enjoyments. The ſinners, who are at eaſe, ſhall inſtantly be overwhelmed with confuſion and horror; and an awful diſtinction ſhall be made between many of thoſe, who may then be in the ſame houſe or field, engaged together in the ſame employment. They, who are moſt intimately united upon earth, may hereafter be parted aſunder, and unalterably appointed to different ſtates, as they may differ in their characters. "One ſhall be taken" to the preſence, the glory, and the throne of God; "and the other left" to receive the due reward of his deeds, and endure the fierceneſs of divine wrath.

What a tremendous ſubject is this! Can we forget it, or treat it with levity? Why are we not more affected by the thought, that "the Judge ſtandeth before

before the door?" He will ſummon us to his bar; and we muſt "give account of ourſelves to him." How ſhall we abide the ſcrutiny of that ſtrict and impartial trial? We hear that ſome ſhall be ſeparated from their deareſt connections in life, and conſigned to a place of miſery. Does not this excite in us a holy jealouſy for ourſelves, and rouſe us to enquire, what is to be done? Let us liſten to our Lord's application, in which he exhorts us to a ſerious and continual preparation for his coming.

Is it an unqueſtionable truth, that "He will judge the world in righteouſneſs?" And is the time uncertain? How proper is the inference, "Watch ye therefore—take heed to yourſelves—and pray always—be ye ready!" Keep at a diſtance from every thing, which would expoſe you to his diſpleaſure, or be inconſiſtent with an habitual expectation of his advent. Beware, leſt on any occaſion your hearts be oppreſſed by intemperance or an inordinate attention to ſecular affairs; for theſe would bring a ſtupor upon you, and prevent you from poſſeſſing, as you ought, a conſtant readineſs to meet your Lord. Ah! how many will be found in ſuch a thoughtleſs ſtate, that they will be ſurpriſed and overwhelmed with horror at his appearance! It is neceſſary, therefore, that you exerciſe an unceaſing vigilance and circumſpection, if you would eſcape the confuſion and miſery, which they will endure.

How carefully do you guard your habitations againſt deſigns of violence in the night ſeaſon! If you had any reaſon to apprehend an aſſault from robbers, you would not dare to compoſe yourſelves to ſleep. Though

you know not the particular hour when the attack may be made, you will provide for the ſecurity of your perſons, families, and property, and take every previous meaſure to defeat the invader's purpoſes. O be wiſe for eternity! Should your Lord come upon you unawares, the conſequence would be infinitely more terrible, than the ranſacking of your houſes by the midnight plunderer. Be therefore jealous guardians, where negligence muſt be followed by deſtruction.

Your preſent ſituation in the Church of Chriſt is like that of ſervants and ſtewards, to whom their maſter, upon his departure, hath intruſted the affairs of his family, and aſſigned their proper employment. It ſhould be your concern, then, to be faithful and diligent, attending to your appointed work, that, when your Lord returns, he may find you occupied in your place, and you may give up your accounts with joy. If ſuch be your readineſs to meet him, you will be inconceivably bleſſed. Marks of diſtinguiſhed honour, and the poſſeſſion of an everlaſting kingdom, will be conferred upon you. Will not the proſpect of that glory ſupport and comfort you in all your difficulties, and animate you to greater exertions of zeal and ſelf-denial?

How ſtrange is that indifference which men diſcover about their eternal ſtate! Many, evidently, reſemble the treacherous and wicked ſervant, who, preſuming upon his maſter's longer abſence, neglects and abuſes his truſt by oppreſſion and intemperance.

Being ſurpriſed in his folly, and unexpectedly called to account, he will be puniſhed with ſevereſt vengeance.

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O do not thus flatter yourſelves, that, becauſe death and judgment may be far diſtant, you may ſafely indulge in ſenſual exceſſes! Your Lord may come, when you are leaſt aware, while you are totally engroſſed with pleaſurable ſchemes: and then what terror and anguiſh will ſeize and rend your guilty ſouls! As he will be inexorable, "he will cut you aſunder, and appoint you your portion with the hypocrites: there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth."

But were theſe ſolemn exhortations of Jeſus deſigned for you? Yes: he himſelf has made the univerſal application; for he declares, "What I ſay unto you, I ſay unto all, WATCH." O live in a conſtant mindfulneſs of that word! Fly to him for mercy, before he come to execute judgment; and ſeek for the renewing influence of his Spirit, that "you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleaſing." Then ſhall you be able to meet him at the laſt with that triumphant acclamation, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will ſave us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his ſalvation *." Amen.

* Iſa. xxv. 9.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 35.

Jesus inculcated a serious preparation for his coming, by the parables of the ten virgins, and of the talents, and then gave a particular description of the last judgment.

THE Son of man will come again, but not as in the days of his humiliation. He will come, not as "a man of sorrows," but as "the Lord of glory;" not to offer himself a sacrifice, but to execute judgment; not to contend with the opposition of sinners, but to manifest the character, and determine the everlasting condition, of each individual in the whole human race. He himself has told us, that he will return for these very purposes, and we profess to expect it. "What manner of persons," then, "ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God * !"

We have already contemplated the Saviour, as he sat upon the mount of Olives, foretelling his final advent, and exhorting his disciples to make a suitable preparation. We shall now consider the conclusion of his solemn address on the same occasion, in which

* 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12.

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he gives ſtronger and ſublimer repreſentations of that grand event, and enforces the duty of conſtant watchfulneſs and diligent application to our proper work. May we proceed to the intereſting ſubject with true ſeriouſneſs of mind, and with fervent prayer, that it may produce its due influence upon us!

By an affecting parable, Jeſus exhibited the preſent ſtate of things in his viſible Church, the different characters of its members, and the different reception they will meet with from him at the laſt day *. Ten virgins are deſcribed as attending at the celebration of a marriage, and preparing to meet the bridegroom, that they may conduct his bride by the light of their lamps, according to the ancient cuſtom of nuptials in the eaſt. The Lord Jeſus Chriſt is the Bridegroom here ſignified, who will ſhortly come to complete the union with his illuſtrious ſpouſe, and receive her to his own glorious kingdom. In the mean time, all thoſe, who profeſs the Goſpel, are required to hold themſelves in a ſtate of readineſs, that they may obey his ſummons, and accompany him on that occaſion to his heavenly manſions. Such was the office of the virgins: ah! how widely did they differ from each other! "Five of them were wiſe, and five were fooliſh." Yet this difference was not eaſily diſcernible till the cloſing ſcene. They all took their lamps, as if they were properly prepared to attend upon the bridegroom, and waited for his appearance. But the wiſe only were furniſhed with oil, ſufficient to ſupply their lamps, when their original ſtock ſhould be exhauſted. The

* Matt. xxv. 1, &c.

foolish provided not for a future hour: they were satisfied with just so much, as would afford them light for the present.

An apt resemblance is here exhibited of an awful distinction, which really subsists among the professing followers of Christ, however it may now be concealed from us by specious disguises. Such as are evidently careless, and have not even the shew of piety, come not under the description of the parable. Their danger is too manifest to be doubted. But of those, who seem to be strictly religious, and warmly attached to the service of Christ, all possess not the same holy principle in their hearts. Some only are truly "wise unto salvation," being inwardly what their external profession imports. They have received forgiveness of their sins, and are renewed in righteousness, so that, whenever their Lord shall come, they will be found an acceptable people in his sight. The vital and operative influence of divine grace dwells within them, and is their security for a future day: by this they persevere to the end, and therefore will be saved.

Others, alas! with fair appearances deceive both themselves and the Church around them. They "have a form of godliness," which procures them esteem; and with this they are content. They may be regular in their conduct; and blameless before men; they may be zealous for right doctrines, and strict in all ritual observances of religion. Yet they are "foolish," in neglecting to look forward and provide for death and judgment. They may make a glittering shew for the present; but possessing not "the new heart

heart and the new ſpirit," nor being truly united to Chriſt, they cannot endure the approaching trial, or be "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light." The Lord alone can infallibly diſcern this great difference between perſons, whoſe profeſſions and appearances are the ſame: but it becomes us to ſearch ourſelves, for our character and ſtate will ſoon be determined for ever.

Through the delay of the bridegroom, the painfulneſs of watching overcame the virgins: the protracted duty of a ſentinel wearied their ſpirits, and they were all tempted to indulge themſelves in ſleep. Ah! what remiſſneſs and ſtupor do we perceive among real as well as nominal Chriſtians! While death and judgment are thought to be at a diſtance, do we not ſink down into a ſpiritual languor and ſupineneſs? Have not worldly cares and ſenſual gratifications a tendency to deprive our ſouls of their proper vigour and activity? We ſleep, when we ought to be awake, and, inſtead of waiting to meet our Lord, have need to be rouſed from our lethargy. That this ſhould be the caſe with thoſe, who poſſeſs not the power of godlineſs, is no wonder. But it is ſtrange indeed, that true believers ſhould fall into ſuch a torpor: and yet few even of them preſerve that heavenly frame of mind, which conſiſts in an habitual looking for the Saviour.

The approach of the bridegroom was at length announced. The ſolemn ſummons was proclaimed at midnight, "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." The virgins aroſe, and immediately endeavoured to put themſelves in a ſtate

of readineſs. And now, the fooliſh diſcovered their own negligence and deficiency; but it was too late to find a remedy. Their lamps were entirely gone out. In vain they implored a ſupply of oil from the wiſe, who had no more than was abſolutely neceſſary for themſelves. In vain they attempted to purchaſe. The warning was too ſhort: the bridegroom was at hand They only, who were wiſe, were prepared to meet him, and admitted to partake of the marriage feaſt. "The door was ſhut," to the excluſion of all others: though the foolish earneſtly ſolicited to be received, they were rejected with abhorrence.

How awful will be the notice of death and judgment! Muſt it not effectually rouſe and awaken every ſoul of man? "The hypocrites in Zion" will be thrown into the utmoſt conſternation and horror, when they perceive their real ſtate, and find that their former light of falſe profeſſion and falſe hope is entirely extinguiſhed, and that it will then profit them nothing. When they are about to be ſummoned to the bar of God, they may try, perhaps, to make preparation, and call on all around to help them. But in vain: their day of grace is expired, and no further mercy is to be obtained. They muſt be taken away, as they are, nor can they be admitted into the heavenly kingdom, however they may "cry with a great and exceeding bitter cry." Alas! to what purpoſe had they maintained a profeſſion of religion ſo long? Their formal ſervices, their cold and hypocritical attendance upon religious ordinances will then appear

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utterly unavailing. No ſuch petition, as "Lord, Lord, open to us," will be accepted: they are excluded for ever.

But thoſe, who have been "ſound in the faith," will be unſpeakably bleſſed. They may be overtaken in a ſtate of very culpable negligence; yet it is not the ſleep of the inſincere. Notwithſtanding their failures and declenſions, they preſerve a ſupreme love to God and an habitual union with Chriſt. They are, therefore, actually "ready," though they may be ſurpriſed in a frame of mind, not ſo lively and ſpiritual as they ought at all times to poſſeſs. Upon the firſt intimations of their Lord's approach, they may be perplexed; but they are ſafe: they ſhall enter with him into his kingdom, and ſit down at his table. And "bleſſed are they which are called unto the marriage ſupper of the Lamb*."

Jeſus has taught us to make a proper application of the parable. As we know not at what hour we ſhall be ſummoned to meet him, he enjoins us to maintain a conſtant vigilance, and to wait with uncloſed eye-lids the ſignals of his appearance. Let us ſeek for his pardoning and renewing grace, through the merit of his blood and the influence of the Holy Ghoſt: and, being thus reconciled to God, "let us watch and be ſober." If we expect the coming of our Lord, what have we to do with ſelf-indulgence? O "let us not ſleep as do others," nor be content merely to eſcape condemnation, but "give diligence, that an entrance may be miniſtered unto us abundantly, into the

* Rev. xix. 9.

the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ * !"

He continued to warn his disciples of the last judgment, and by another parable urged the necessity of activity in his service, as in that, which we have just considered, he had inculcated a holy watchfulness. One, of a similar nature and tendency, had been delivered before †; but we need not be anxious to avoid a repetition of instructions so important.

A person of rank and property is represented, as departing to a distant country, and previously committing the care of his substance to his servants, that they may improve it for his use. He distributed his effects among them in shares of different value, to one five talents, to another two, and to another one, according to their respective ability. Thus, also, Jesus deals with his Church. He is the great Lord and Proprietor of all; and, as every thing is derived from him, every thing should be employed with a view to his glory. He is gone into heaven; but those, who are called by his name, are required, in his absence, to manage his concerns. All our possessions, advantages, and opportunities, our natural capacities, and the gifts of providence, which we enjoy, are granted to us, not as our own absolute right, but as a temporary trust. We are enjoined to turn them to the best account, to make them our commercial store, for the diffusion and interchange of blessings, that we may promote the honour of God and the advancement of true religion. This, however, cannot be effected without great exertions and unwearied assiduity.

* 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. † Luke xix. 12—27. See Sect. 30.

What

What, then, was the conduct of these servants? The two, who had received most, improved and even doubled their stock by a diligent application: but the man, to whom the one talent was committed, being secretly disaffected to his master, refused to make any use of it whatever. Our Lord meant not to intimate, that those, who are placed in the most eminent situations, are most faithful and laborious in doing his work; for fact and experience often prove the contrary. But the representation was rather intended to teach us, that they, who enjoy the fewest advantages, are accountable to him. Blessed be God there are those in his Church, who move in the highest and most enlarged sphere with credit to their profession, and extensive benefit to others. They who are truly devoted to him, and live under the influence of his grace, cannot allow themselves in habitual indolence. Their heart's desire is to embrace every opportunity and exert all their faculties, that they may render themselves of real use, in their generation. Do we answer this description? Are there not many among us, who, with peculiar gifts, are doing nothing, or nothing to the purpose? And is it not disgraceful to be as drones, an incumbrance, instead of a blessing, to society? Or is no danger to be apprehended from such a conduct? Let us attend to the issue.

The servants were continued in their trust for a considerable time; but at length their master returned, and called them to a strict account. Thus, in due season, Jesus will be revealed from heaven, and it will be one great end of his appearance, to reckon with

with us. Yes: he will demand of us, and it will be publicly declared, what has been our plan of life, in what manner we employed the depofit, which he left under our care.

The diligent and faithful fervants were diftinguifhed by their lord's approbation, and received a large recompenfe. They reprefented with humble gratitude, what he had enabled them to do. They owned his goodnefs, and gave him the praife. With kind condefcenfion, he inftantly applauded their fidelity, and rewarded their exertions with a proportionable fhare of preferment. Such will be the favourable acceptance, which believers, who have lived not unto themfelves, but unto Jefus their exalted Mafter, fhall meet with from him at his final advent. They are indebted to him for their whole falvation, and they will acknowledge their beft obedience to be the fruit of his love. This, however, he determines to exhibit before the affembled univerfe, for his own honour as well as for their happinefs. He will declare himfelf well pleafed in their upright and zealous endeavours to promote his glory, and affign them a portion of the felicities of his kingdom. It fhould, alfo, be remarked as an inftance and proof of his mercy, no lefs than of his righteoufnefs, that he will approve in his people thofe very works, which they performed only by the influence of his Spirit, and that he will beftow upon them rewards, adjufted to the various degrees of their faithfulnefs and affiduity.

What, then, became of the flothful fervant? He feems to have flattered himfelf, that he was fafe, at

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leaſt, if not worthy of commendation, becauſe he had not ſquandered away the money committed to him. He preſumed even to vindicate his conduct by the moſt injurious repreſentations of his maſter, as requiring what was ſevere, unreaſonable, unjuſt, or impoſſible. But his very pleas were urged againſt him, and formed the ground of his condemnation; for they ſhewed his baſeneſs, inconſiſtency, and malignant diſpoſition towards his lord. He was, accordingly, turned out with diſgrace from the truſt which he had abuſed, and ſentenced to a ſtate of endleſs impriſonment and conſummate wretchedneſs.

This is an awful deſcription of the preſent character and final doom of thoſe, who are "idle and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt." Poſſibly, they may have the moſt confident expectations of eſcaping puniſhment, becauſe their behaviour is inoffenſive; and they may not be undeceived, till they are called to give up their accounts. But on that occaſion no one will be excuſed, merely becauſe he has done no harm, even if ſuch a pretence were true. It will be enquired, how much real and poſitive good has been effected. Do any dare to hope, that the great difficulties of a religious life, for which their ſtrength is unequal, will juſtify their indolence? They ſhould be reminded, that the more arduous their work appears, the more ſtrenuous exertions are neceſſary, and that the weakneſs, of which they complain, is not to be charged upon God, as it is no other than their own extreme depravity, a confirmed hatred of God and holineſs. Their notions that the obedience, which God

God requires, is unpleasant, impracticable, and a tyrannical imposition, are false, and evince a deep malignity of mind. These, therefore, will be produced against them to their entire confusion. Even on their own principles, their conduct should be far different; and, whatever they may talk of their inability, they will be condemned for their negligence. To be "slothful," in the language of the parable, is to be "wicked;" and those who are "unprofitable," that is, useless in their place and generation, shall be finally excluded from God and happiness, and consigned to everlasting torment and despair; where they may for ever bewail their folly, but must continue to feel its effects in a state of unutterable anguish.

The proper conclusion, then, is, that the present life is not a time for loitering. You must expect the return of your Lord to reckon with you; and, therefore, you must not only wait for him, but diligently apply to his work. It is not enough, that you avoid gross and scandalous offences, or be harmless in society. If no fruits of righteousness are produced, no glory brought to God, no benefit accrue to his Church, through your labours of faith and love, you must hear that tremendous sentence, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus proceeded to enforce these awful admonitions in the most explicit terms, without the obscurity of a parable, describing his future advent, and the manner in which the last judgment will be conducted. The passage, as it stands in the Evangelist, is singularly

ſublime and affecting. It ſets before us a ſcene the moſt grand and intereſting, which can poſſibly be conceived. All in heaven, and all on earth are convened together, (an immenſe, and innumerable company!) while their Creator and their Governor, taking his ſeat upon a throne of glorious majeſty, enters into a ſtrict examination of every human character, and appoints to all the children of Adam their proper places, either in happineſs or miſery for ever. We are here, then, obliged to conſider ourſelves before the great tribunal, in the midſt of the aſſembled univerſe.

Every eye is fixed upon the perſon of the Judge. It is "the Son of man," who aſſumed our nature, and once dwelt among us in a ſtate of profound humiliation. How different from the firſt, is this his ſecond advent! He comes with ſupreme authority, and diſplays the brightneſs and perfections of Deity. It is the time of his public manifeſtation, when the dignity and excellency of his character, which were obſcured during his reſidence on the earth, are known and confeſſed by all. And are we not conſtrained from the very deſcription before us to own, that Jeſus is "the Lord of glory," "over all, God bleſſed for ever?" Conſidering the grandeur of his appearance, and his illuſtrious retinue, attended as he is by all the holy Angels; conſidering, too, the nature of his office, which implies that he poſſeſſes no leſs than omniſcience and a ſovereign power of determining the final ſtate of all mankind, and of cloſing the gates of heaven and hell for ever; we cannot heſitate to conclude that he

is Jehovah. O let us give him, what he is worthy to receive, our unfeigned and ſupreme reverence, confidence, and love! Let "every knee bow at his name, and every tongue confeſs, that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord."

The whole human race are gathered together before him, and ſtand to take their trial at his bar. But his all-diſcerning eye ſeparates them into two claſſes, according to their characters; and in this diviſion the one need fear no miſtake, nor the other preſumptuouſly expect it. His faithful people, who have owned him as their Shepherd, and who were redeemed and defended by him as the ſheep of his flock, are placed on his right hand; and on his left are all thoſe, who have continued in oppoſition to him, in the uncleanneſs of their natural corruption, and who are therefore hateful in his ſight.

With a ſolemnity and majeſty, which no words can deſcribe, he proceeds to paſs the irrevocable ſentence. The King of glory ſpeaks, declaring his affectionate regard for thoſe on his right hand, as being dear to his Father and diſtinguiſhed by his grace. He welcomes them to his preſence, and commands them to enter into the immediate poſſeſſion of that inheritance, which had been originally appointed for them in the divine counſels. Yet, as that is "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God," he juſtifies his favour to them, and proves undeniably the equity of his diſpenſations. To this end he produces to public view the works of righteouſneſs, which they have performed through faith, and from love to his name.

name. Their acts of kindneſs in relieving and comforting his afflicted and oppreſſed people, he exhibits as an evidence, that they are the very perſons, to whom the promiſes are made. They themſelves, it ſhould ſeem, would not preſume to mention their beſt exertions in his ſervice: theſe do not conſtitute the ground of their dependence. Nay, they expreſs their wonder, that He ſhould ſpeak, in terms of ſuch honourable regard and approbation, of their obedience and zeal, which they had ſcarcely been conſcious of, and knew to be unworthy of his notice. But he confirms the ſentence, and graciouſly declares that he accepts and recompenſes what they have done for the meaneſt member of his Church, as if it were done to himſelf.

In the mean time, the impenitent and unbelieving are filled with horror and diſmay, waiting to receive their doom. The King Omnipotent turns to them, and, to evince his holy indignation at the baſeneſs of their conduct, bids them to depart from him, under the weight of his curſe, into a ſtate of endleſs torment. There they muſt be companions of thoſe apoſtate ſpirits, the Devil and his angels, with whom they were confederate in rebellion. Nor is this the decree of a mercileſs tyrant, but the appointment of a righteous Judge. Accordingly, he proceeds to bring forth the ſtrongeſt evidence againſt them, and proves from their diſobedience, unbelief, and contempt of his name, that they deſerve this heavy condemnation. Their neglect of thoſe duties of mercy, which he indiſpenſably requires as the fruits of faith and love,

clearly manifests their character, and justifies his decision. Many of them in this life appear not to be sensible of their guilt, and even rise up in their own vindication: but if, at that day, they should presume to deny the charge, it will be substantiated from the unerring testimony of the King himself, to their entire confusion. He will convict them of falshood and hypocrisy, in pretending a regard to him, when they have despised his poor members; and therefore he will declare, that his sentence against them shall stand.

It remains only, that the determination of the Judge be carried into effect. Accordingly, those, who come under his condemnation, are driven away from his presence, and consigned to that tremendous punishment, from which there can be no release: and those, who are justified before him, immediately receive the consummation of their bliss and glory, which will be durable as the existence of God himself.

This important description leads us to observe,

1. That good works will obtain an honourable notice at the last day. God forbid, therefore, that we should not now give them their proper consequence and attention. The enquiry at the tribunal of Christ, as here represented, will be instituted concerning the evidences of our faith. Our obedience will be produced to prove the sincerity of our religious professions, and the strength as well as reality of our principles. This testimony will be required, not for the information or satisfaction of the Judge, who is intimately acquainted with every case, and with the

very ſecrets of all hearts, but for the exhibition of his own righteous character before the univerſe. We perceive, too, that a ſpecial regard will be paid to acts of Chriſtian kindneſs and liberality. Much ſtreſs is laid upon love, as peculiarly pleaſing to God: upon that love, which ſhews itſelf in vigorous exertions for the ſupport and conſolation of thoſe, who belong to the family of Chriſt. This, which is the neceſſary fruit of faith, maintains, in all its efforts, a continual reſpect to the Saviour; on which account it is honoured with ſo high a commendation. But this is eſſentially different from that vain, indiſcriminate generoſity, which proceeds not from right motives, and which, though admired by the world, is offenſive to God. We obſerve, alſo,

2. That the ſins of unbelievers will be publicly declared in the day of judgment. We cannot be concealed from the piercing eye of God. Every inſtance of our miſconduct is noted down in his book; and, if we do not now obtain remiſſion through the blood of the croſs, all will be produced againſt us at the ſolemn reckoning. No man will be condemned without evidence, and the evidence againſt ſinners will be ſo ſtrong and inconteſtable, as to ſilence their pleas, and confound them before their Judge. The habitual neglect of known duties, no leſs than the actual commiſſion of groſs iniquity, will exclude us from heaven; ſince the former, as well as the latter, will prove the heart unſound. This is, indeed, a moſt alarming conſideration; and yet it neceſſarily follows from our Lord's deſcription. Thoſe, who are deſtitute of love,

or not actuated by a supreme regard to Christ to lay themselves out for the benefit of his Church, shall hear the tremendous sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed."

What, then, is to be done? Let us be solicitous to obtain that faith, which "worketh by love." Let us pray to be united to Jesus, as living branches of the true vine; that we may be "filled with the fruits of righteousness," and "have boldness in the day of judgment." Amen.

SECT. 36.

Jesus celebrated the passover—washed his disciples' feet —instituted the Eucharist—declared the treachery of Judas, and the approaching fall of Peter.

It was love, which brought down the Saviour from heaven; a love, which must astonish those, who seriously contemplate its inexpressible dimensions; a love, which is constant, immutable, and everlasting. This principle appeared to actuate him during the whole of his abode on earth; and especially toward the close of his life every minute circumstance was so ordered, as to shew the strength and tenderness of his affection for the dear followers, whom he had chosen to himself. He retained his little family about him, all of whom except one, had been sincerely attached to him; and now, though he was about to depart from them, his kindness was undiminished: he continued most ardently desirous of promoting their happiness, even to the latest moment *. We also may rejoice, that He is " the Lord, who changeth not;" and that he has expressly declared to every believer, " I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

* John xiii. 1.

 A general

A general account is given us of the manner, in which he ſpent the few days immediately preceding his death. He conſtantly attended the temple, where he taught the people with unwearied aſſiduity, and retired each evening to the mount of Olives, probably for the purpoſes of devotion *. On the Tueſday, after delivering the inſtructions which we have conſidered, he warned his diſciples, that he ſhould be betrayed and crucified at the approaching feſtival †. Then alſo, as it ſhould ſeem, while the rulers were conſulting, how they might deſtroy him without raiſing a public commotion, Judas went and bargained with them for a paltry ſum of money, the common price of a ſlave, treacherouſly to ſurrender up his Maſter into their hands.

Thurſday in Paſſion week.

On the morning of Thurſday, Jeſus commanded two of his diſciples to make the neceſſary preparations for celebrating the paſſover ‡. But as they were deſtitute of an habitation of their own, where could they aſſemble together for the purpoſe? This difficulty was ſoon removed; and the manner of its removal proved, that Jeſus poſſeſſed a clear knowledge of all events, and exerciſed a full authority over every heart. He deſcribed to his choſen meſſengers the place and circumſtances, in which they ſhould meet the ſervant of one, who would be

* Luke xxi. 37, 38. Bethany lay at the foot of this mount, and perhaps our Lord ſpent ſome part of his evenings with his beloved friends in that town. See Sect. 32. Matt. xxi. 17.

† Matt. xxvi. 1—5, 14—16. Mark xiv. 1, 2, 10, 11. Luke xxii. 1—6.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 17—20. Mark xiv. 12—17. Luke xxii. 7—18.

immediately

immediately diſpoſed to receive them into his houſe. There they provided the paſchal lamb; and thither he repaired with the twelve, at the proper hour of the evening, for the obſervation of the holy ſolemnity. When they were ſet down together, he addreſſed them with peculiar tenderneſs, aſſuring them that he had felt an earneſt deſire to partake of that paſſover with them, before he quitted the world. He then directed, that they ſhould divide the cup of wine among themſelves, (which was an uſual ceremony at the beginning of the paſchal ſupper) and declared, that he would no more drink of the fruit of the vine, till God ſhould introduce his kingdom, and the object of that ordinance ſhould be fulfilled.

The Jewiſh ſacrament, here mentioned, exhibited in a typical manner ſome of the grand bleſſings of the Goſpel. It was appointed to preſerve a remembrance of the deliverance of the Iſraelites, when the deſtroying Angel ſlew all the firſt-born of the Egyptians *, and, at the ſame time, to repreſent the ſecurity, which the true Iſrael ſhall receive through the ſhedding of the blood of Jeſus. He is the end and ſubſtance of the ordinance; and for that very reaſon it was deſigned, that he ſhould be betrayed at the particular ſeaſon, and on the very night, when the paſchal lamb was killed, that he might more exactly anſwer to the type. "Chriſt our paſſover is ſacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feaſt †," not the Jewiſh, but the Chriſtian feſtival; and let us be ſolicitous, that the blood of this Lamb of God may be ſprinkled upon our

* Exod. xii. † 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

 hearts

hearts by faith; for without this we ſhall ſtand exposed to the "fiery indignation, which ſhall devour the adverſaries."

It is not eaſy, nor is it of conſequence to our plan, to ſettle preciſely the order of the various circumſtances, which occurred at the laſt ſupper. At that time probably, but in which part of the entertainment we do not determine, Jeſus ſubmitted to aſſume the habit and employment of a ſervant, and waſh the feet of his diſciples *. This tranſaction was conducted, not in a light and trifling manner, but with a ſerious ſolemnity; and we perceive an inexpreſſible grandeur as well as condeſcenſion in the Saviour's deportment. Knowing that Judas had formed the ſcheme of betraying him, and that his own departure was near, he was deſirous of improving the few remaining hours in delivering all neceſſary inſtructions to his dear diſciples. For this purpoſe, though conſcious of his great dignity, as the ſupreme Almighty Lord, who came down from the throne of glory in the higheſt heavens, and was about to return thither, he deſigned to exhibit a further inſtance of his deep humiliation. He roſe up from ſupper, and put himſelf into the habit of a menial ſervant, that he might miniſter to his poor followers, and He, who was Lord of all, ſtooped to the very loweſt office, while with his own hands he waſhed their feet.

We cannot but wonder at his conduct, and aſk, what end it was deſigned to anſwer. It appears to have been a ſignificant action, intended to repreſent the nature and efficacy of that grace, by which he pu-

* John xiii. 1—17.

rifies

rifies his people from their natural pollution. This is his own explanation. When Peter objected the unsuitableneſs of his exalted Maſter's performing ſo mean a ſervice for him, Jeſus replied, that this, as well as his other diſpenſations, would be more clearly underſtood hereafter, and added, "If I waſh thee not, thou haſt no part with me." Are we, then, ſenſible of our great defilement? It is declared, that "we are all as an unclean thing*," "altogether become filthy †." Were this properly underſtood, it would produce in us a deep abhorrence of ourſelves, and a cordial eſteem for the Saviour, whoſe office it is to deliver us from corruption, and communicate ſpiritual purity. Then we ſhould rejoice in that gracious promiſe, "I will ſprinkle clean water upon you, and ye ſhall be clean: from all your filthineſs and from all your idols will I cleanſe you ‡." Then we ſhould pray, as Peter, "Lord, waſh not my feet only, but alſo my hands and my head." Thoſe, indeed, who are the faithful diſciples of Jeſus, are clean already, as he teſtified; but it is ſtill neceſſary, even for them, to renew their application to him, that they may be freed from thoſe pollutions, which they are daily contracting.

The action was deſigned, likewiſe, as a leſſon of humility to all his people. He had frequently inculcated poverty of ſpirit, ſelf-denial, meekneſs, and lowlineſs of mind: and now, to confirm the inſtructions he had given, he ſtooped to this ſervice. He, therefore, called upon the twelve, to be conſiſtent with their profeſſions of regarding him as their Maſter and Lord, and

* Iſa. lxiv. 6. † Pſal. liii. 3. ‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

to follow his example by a readineſs to ſubmit to mean and painful employments, for the benefit and comfort of others. He reminded them, that a ſimilar conduct would be no diſparagement to them, who were only his attendants and meſſengers, and that their religious knowledge would be a bleſſing, no farther than it produced a ſuitable practice.

The ſolemn admonition, probably, had a peculiar reference to the ſtate of their minds. It was at that time, when a ſtrange and unſeaſonable contention had ariſen among them, about the chief preferment in the temporal dominion, which they ſtill expected him to eſtabliſh *. This ambitious ſpirit, theſe carnal views and affections he reproved. He argued, that, though a fondneſs for power prevailed in the Gentile world, it was inconſiſtent with their character and engagements, who were required to ſhew their eminence by condeſcenſion and meekneſs. He himſelf had appeared among them in the form of a ſervant. He aſſured them, that he did not forget their faithful and ſteadfaſt attachment through his various afflictions, and that he would recompenſe it by conducting them to a ſtate of exaltation, far ſuperior to that which they had ſo eagerly deſired. He ſolemnly promiſed them, that they ſhould partake of that bliſs and glory, which he was going to poſſeſs, that they ſhould there enjoy the moſt intimate communion with him, and even ſit, like his aſſeſſors in the judgment, with marks of peculiar dignity, approving and confirming the ſentence,

* Luke xxii. 24—30.

which ſhould be pronounced upon the twelve tribes of Iſrael.

We alſo, who follow the Saviour, ſhould be inſtructed to look for our preferment in the world above. Being " faithful unto death," we ſhall receive " a crown of life." The meaneſt of his ſervants ſhall hereafter obtain " a kingdom, which cannot be moved." A diſtinguiſhed honour, doubtleſs, is reſerved for the Apoſtles at the laſt day. Yet believers of a lower order may exult in the proſpect of their future advancement. " Do ye not know, that the ſaints ſhall judge the world * ?" Jeſus himſelf hath declared, without reſpect of perſons, " To him that overcometh, will I grant to ſit with me in my throne †." But, for the preſent, this is our direction, " Mind not high things, but condeſcend to men of low eſtate ‡." We are forbidden to cheriſh ambition and avarice, envy and contention. We are ſtrictly enjoined to forego our own intereſt, eaſe, and reputation, whenever we can thereby render ourſelves more extenſively uſeful in life. With this view we muſt frequently ſubmit to ſuch ſervices, as may ſeem to diminiſh our conſequence, and require painful and laborious exertions. This will ſhew that we imitate our great exemplar; and thoſe only can claim an intereſt in his promiſes, who are willing to tread in his ſteps.

Where, then, ſhall we find thoſe, who maintain the Chriſtian character with conſiſtency? Many there are, who compliment Jeſus with the appellation of Lord and Maſter: but we aſk, Do you poſſeſs the

* 1 Cor. vi. 2. † Rev. iii. 21. ‡ Rom. xii. 16.

mind,

mind, which was in Him? Is He the pattern, which you propose to yourselves for the regulation of your own spirit and practice? Are you living under the habitual influence of humility? The appearance and the language you may easily assume: but does the disposition itself abide in you, and govern your conduct? What means that selfishness, that pride, and eagerness for advancement, which we so frequently discover under a religious profession? How unsuitable for you, who should be dead to the world, are all contentions about honour and precedency! Do not the various commotions, by which even the Church itself is divided, prove, that there is little of real Christianity among us, because there is little conformity to Christ? Why do you decline this or the other office, to which you are called? Possibly, it may seem low and degrading in the estimation of men; it may be grating to corrupt nature; or it may obstruct your secular views. But, while you contemplate the Lord of glory washing the feet of his disciples, be ashamed of paying so much regard to your own convenience. Surely, it is not beneath you to copy after him; and to do this, you must be "as one that serveth."

Upon the same occasion, also, Jesus instituted the Eucharist, probably before they rose from the table, since it is said to be done "as they were eating." While he fulfilled in himself the ancient passover, and abolished its observance, he embraced that opportunity to ordain a new sacrament, which succeeded to it, as baptism did to circumcision. This is a rite of peculiar importance under the Gospel dispensation; and it

is not difficult to afcertain its nature and defign, from the clear account which is given of its original appointment *.

Jefus took bread, and, looking up with devout affections to God for his bleffing, he divided it into feveral fhares. He then diftributed it among his difciples, commanding them to receive it as an emblem of his fuffering body, and in commemoration of his death. In like manner, alfo, he delivered to them a cup of wine, which he directed them all to partake of, as a reprefentation of his precious blood, whereby the new Covenant is confirmed to us, and remiffion of fins obtained. He further declared, that he fhould no more join with them in that folemnity upon earth, but that they fhould hereafter celebrate together the facred myfteries therein exhibited.

Such was the inftitution: nor can we doubt that the obfervance of it is binding upon us, fince an Apoftle has taught us, that hereby we are to "fhew the Lord's death, TILL HE COME †." It is alfo manifeft, from the plain and fimple defcription before us, for what purpofes, and with what temper of mind, we fhould communicate in this divine ordinance. Jefus himfelf is the grand object, which it is intended to difplay. He is fet forth before us, as our fpiritual food and fuftenance. Thofe vifible elements, bread and wine, which afford peculiar nourifhment to our bodies, very fitly reprefent Him, who alone can maintain the life and vigour of our fouls. Yet, as he does this only in

* Matt. xxvi. 26—30. Mark xiv. 22—26. Luke xxii. 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. xi. 26.

consequence

confequence of his fufferings, he is here propofed to our view, as wounded, bleeding, dying for us. His body, like the bread, was broken; his blood, like the wine, was poured out. Thus, we obferve, by virtue of his facrifice, "his flefh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed *."

The participation of this facrament fhews the neceffity of receiving Chrift by faith. The bread and wine muft be taken, before they can yield any nutriment: and "except we eat the flefh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, we have no life in us †." Then efpecially, when we approach to his table, we fhould exercife a fixed and ftrong dependence upon him. Let us attend to his own injunction, "Do this in remembrance of me." Let us bear in mind the dignity of his perfon, the glory which he originally poffeffed, and the humiliation to which he ftooped. We are to regard him, not only as a bright example, or a kind benefactor, but as our High Prieft, offering up himfelf as an atonement to God, to make reconciliation for us. Thus, while we remember the agonies, which he endured, we fhould "look upon him, whom we have pierced, and mourn for him ‡." The recollection of his crofs will conftrain us to "abhor ourfelves, and repent in duft and afhes."

Yet, as a holy feftival, it affords a proper occafion for the exercife of lively joy. What can be fo calculated to revive and gladden the heart, as the view of thofe ineftimable benefits, which are here exhibited? What can tend more to infpire us with hope, confi-

* John vi. 55. † vi. 53. ‡ Zech. xii. 10.

dence,

dence, love, and zeal? Nay, it is the appointed method, in which God is pleaſed to ſtrengthen, quicken, and comfort his people; and, as our wants return upon us, ſo, by a frequent attendance on this ordinance, we ſhould ſeek freſh communications of grace. We are encouraged to expect his preſence and bleſſing, and thus are enabled to maintain a freedom of intercourſe with him. Such an attendance, alſo, will be the means of uniting us together in the bonds of Chriſtian fellowſhip, and of rendering us "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." What a ſource of happineſs is this! Yet does not the general neglect of the Lord's table prove, that the Saviour has but a ſmall ſhare in our remembrances?

We do not invite ſinners, who are living in ignorance and contempt of God. We warn them not to profane the ſolemnity by their formality and irreverence. If you feel not your need of Jeſus, nor deſire to pleaſe him, inſult him not by preſuming to "eat of his bread, and to drink of the wine which he hath mingled." But you, who are bowed down with a ſenſe of guilt and depravity, who earneſtly wiſh to accept ſalvation on the terms of the Goſpel, may approach with humble hope. Only devote your ſouls and your all to Jeſus, and bind yourſelves by a vow to ſerve him with all your faculties, to the laſt moment of your lives: and here you may expect to receive the tokens of his love, and the gracious ſupplies of his Spirit.

Judas was preſent, while our Lord declared in the ſtrongeſt terms his high regard for his diſciples; and it is probable, that even the traitor himſelf participated

of

of the holy Euchariſt. But, though he had acted his part in ſo ſubtle a manner, as not to be ſuſpected by the other Apoſtles, neither his character nor his deſigns were concealed from Jeſus. At length it appeared expedient, that the reſt alſo ſhould be appriſed of the diabolical plan of treachery, then ripe for execution. While, therefore, they were all at table together, the Saviour intimated his perfect knowledge of it: and this he did, that his choſen followers might not be ſtaggered, when they ſhould ſee one from among themſelves ſo ſcandalouſly deſert his poſt, but be confirmed in the faith, by obſerving a completion of the ſcriptures in that event. He exhorted them, alſo, to perſevere in their zealous exertions for his cauſe, aſſuring them, that both he and his Father were concerned for their favourable reception in the world *.

In the view of this ſad caſe, Jeſus felt a keen anguiſh of ſpirit. He then declared more explicitly, " One of you ſhall betray me;" " the hand of the traitor is with me on the table;" and by certain expreſs tokens he marked out Judas as the man, denouncing the moſt tremendous wo againſt him, though he ſhould be the inſtrument of fulfilling the divine counſels. An awful conſternation ſeized the company, and every one, ſuſpecting himſelf rather than Judas, cried out, " Lord, is it I?" But that monſter of iniquity remained unaffected by the ſolemn warning. We might have ſup-

* John xiii. 18—30. Matt. xxvi. 21—25. Mark xiv. 18—21. Luke xxii. 21—23.

posed, that he would have been deterred from his purpose: but he was the more enraged, and went out immediately, under a violent instigation of the Devil, in the darkness of the night, to accomplish his infernal scheme.

Our Lord then exulted in the prospect of those blessed consequences, which would result from the treachery of Judas, as the means of completing the grand work of redemption *. He reminded his disciples, that the hour was approaching, when he himself should enter on a state of high exaltation, and bring glory to God in saving sinners by his death. Looking upon his dear followers with a tenderness of affection, like an indulgent father upon his little children, from whom he was on the point of being separated, he pressed it upon them, as his dying request, that they would continue firmly and warmly attached to one another. This he enjoined as a new command, not unknown, indeed, in former dispensations, but now enforced by fresh motives, and by an example altogether singular in its kind: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." His love to us, then, is to be the cause, the measure, and the pattern of our kindness and regard to all the members of his Church. He recommended, also, this reciprocal, cordial affection, as the strongest proof of our union with him, and the most honourable badge of our profession.

If we understand the full import of our Lord's de-

* John xiii. 31, &c. Luke xxii. 31—38.

 claration

claration, " I have loved you," its influence will be irrefiftible. We fhall not only abhor the treachery of Judas, but dread the thought of difpleafing Him, who has fhewn fuch compaffion and favour toward us. Let us examine our religion on this ground: Do we fcrupuloufly avoid all thofe practices and tempers, which he condemns, and endeavour to exprefs our gratitude by our diligence and fervour in his fervice? Do we cultivate that principle, on which he has laid fuch peculiar ftrefs, unfeigned love to his people for his fake? How excellent would be the fruits of this difpofition! What peace and happinefs would it produce; and how ftrongly would it recommend our fyftem of faith! But we are all lamentably defective in this grace. Do not our peevifhnefs, envy, and contention, our cenforioufnefs, bigotry, and refentment, difgrace our profeffion, and betray our infincerity? Surely, it cannot now be faid, as it was of the primitive Church, " See how thefe Chriftians love one another."

Jefus had intimated his approaching departure; on which Peter, though admonifhed that he could not follow him for the prefent, declared his readinefs to attend him through all dangers, even to death itfelf. Alas! little do we know, how we fhall be able to ftand in the hour of trial. The boafting Apoftle was reproved, and informed, that before the morning light his ftrong confidence fhould be fo fhaken, that he would deny in the moft fhameful manner all connection and acquaintance with his Lord and Mafter. That very night, he was told, would be a time of peculiar temptation, as Satan was defirous to practife his wiles upon them

them all. He was aſſured that his principles would be ſeverely aſſaulted, and his ſoul preſerved from total apoſtaſy, only through the gracious interceſſion of the Saviour. He was further charged, to confirm the faith of his weak brethren, after his own recovery.

Such was the ſolemn caution given to Peter: Jeſus alſo ſubjoined an affecting addreſs to the whole company. He bad them prepare for a ſore conflict, and arm themſelves for the fight. They had been, till then, abundantly ſupplied with neceſſary proviſions, when they went out to preach the Goſpel. But he reminded them, that they would ſoon be ſo entirely deſtitute, as to ſtand in need of a purſe furniſhed with money, a ſcrip with food, and a ſword for their defence. He informed them further, that, as all the ancient prophecies concerning him ſhould be exactly fulfilled, ſo in particular, agreeably to Iſaiah's declaration, he was about to be "numbered with the tranſgreſſors," and to die as a malefactor *. Probably, they miſunderſtood him, as if he wiſhed them to reſiſt their enemies with violence. He intended only to lead their minds to the expectation of a ſevere oppoſition; and they ought to have known, that "the weapons of their warfare were not carnal †."

But, leaving for the preſent the caſe of the Apoſtles, let us remember for ourſelves, that we alſo are required to "endure hardneſs, as good ſoldiers of Jeſus Chriſt ‡." Let us be ſolicitous to maintain his cauſe, which, as a ſacred depoſit intruſted to us, muſt be kept at the hazard of our deareſt temporal intereſts. We ſhould

* Iſa. liii. 12. † 2 Cor. x. 4. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

look for a fierce onſet, and be prepared to make a vigorous defence. But the cautions, now before us, will teach us, not to depend on our own reſolution and ability: for, if we be ſelf-confident, we ſhall, probably, fall like Peter, and taſte the bitter puniſhment of pride. Then, " be ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."—" Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withſtand in the evil day, and having done all to ſtand * "

We ſee our calling: we muſt follow the Saviour, not to worldly honour and preferment, but to ſhame, contempt, and many ſecular diſadvantages. Are we willing to hazard all conſequences in his ſervice? Let us boldly declare ourſelves on his ſide, and entreat him ſo to pray for us, while Satan is ſifting us as wheat, that our faith may not fail. Let us attend him to the croſs, and then we ſhall participate of his glory. Whatever dangers may threaten, or enemies aſſault us, may each of us be able to ſay, " None of theſe things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myſelf, ſo that I might finiſh my courſe with joy † !" Amen.

* Eph. vi. 10, 13. † Acts xx. 24.

JESUS

SECT. 37.

Jesus, before he quitted the guest chamber, exhorted and comforted his Apostles—represented himself as the true Vine—enforced obedience and mutual love—and predicted persecution.

THE solemn celebration of the last passover could not but make a deep impression on the minds of the disciples; and the warnings, then addressed to them, probably excited much perplexity. Their beloved Master had declared, that he should very soon be separated from them by the hand of violence, his death be accomplished through the treachery of one in their own company, and they themselves exposed to a severe assault both from men and Satan. The removal of their Lord, so justly dear to them, was in itself a distressing circumstance; and foreseeing further dangers and difficulties, when deprived of their Head, they felt increasing anguish, and were oppressed with painful apprehensions. Jesus was sensibly affected for them, and, as it should seem, more solicitous on their account than his own. Before, therefore, they retired from the guest-chamber, he renewed his exhorta-

tions, with a view to alleviate their ſorrows, and inſpire them with hope, confidence, and joy *.

How tender and compaſſionate does the Saviour appear, while inſtructing and comforting his mourning diſciples, "as a father does his children!" How exactly calculated to revive their ſpirits, were the conſiderations here ſuggeſted! The benefit of theſe his laſt ſolemn addreſſes was deſigned to reach likewiſe even unto us. How many things do we meet with, which have a tendency to cauſe grief, confuſion, and terror! Obſerving, in what a world of ſin and diſorder we are placed, what calamities frequently occur in human life, and how depraved and helpleſs we ourſelves are, we ſhall, probably, be diſpoſed to indulge a timorous and dejected frame of mind. What, then, is to be done? What can ſupport and animate our ſouls, when dangers and diſtreſſes threaten us on every ſide? Let us hear the Saviour's words, and learn to apply them to our own caſe.

Thus he ſpoke: "Endeavour to lay aſide your anxieties and fears, and ſhew the excellence of your religious principles by your compoſure and courage. You muſt, therefore, not only poſſeſs a due regard to God, as the maker, preſerver, and governor of the world, but alſo fix your attention and reliance upon Me, as the Mediator, through whom alone you can entertain any ſolid hope of the divine favour, any juſt expectation of being ſafely conducted to the heavenly ſtate. In that glorious abode, where my Father diſplays the luſtre of his majeſty, are ſufficient accommodations for the whole Church, numerous as it is; and there

* John xiv. 1, &c.

you

you will not be diſappointed of a peaceable habitation. If this had not been infallibly ſecure, I would not have encouraged or permitted you to look for it. I am going to that kingdom on your behalf, to prepare the way for your admiſſion: and, as I ſhall enter upon the poſſeſſion in your name, I will not be unmindful of you, but return for the expreſs purpoſe of receiving you to my own immediate preſence, that you may dwell for ever near me in that bliſsful inheritance, where even now I already am. After ſuch clear declarations, you cannot miſtake the place of which I ſpeak or the road which will lead you to it."

Thomas, probably underſtanding him as intending to erect a temporal dominion in ſome particular ſpot, deſired further information. Jeſus replied; "I myſelf have opened an acceſs for ſinners unto God; in me the divine promiſes and engagements are ſure and immutable; through me eternal life is ſecured: nor can any one, whatever be his pleas or attainments, approach to the Father, but by means of my mediation. If, therefore, you had known my character and offices, you could not have been ignorant of Him: but now I have revealed him to you, and in me you behold the expreſs image of his perſon*."

Philip expreſſed an ardent deſire, that they might be favoured with an outward manifeſtation of the Father's glory. On this, our Lord reproved him for not having better underſtood the nature and dignity of the Maſter, with whom he had been ſo long converſant, and then declared: "In ſeeing me, you have

* Heb. i. 3.

in effect seen the Father. Do you not credit my solemn assertions, that I am one with him? My words demand your regard, as proceeding from Him; but if these be rejected, the miraculous operations, which I perform by virtue of my union with Him, prove incontestably the mysterious truth which I affirm."

Let us weigh the important doctrines here advanced. The question proposed to Philip, may furnish a reproof to each of us, "Hast thou not known me?" Considering the information we have had, may we not justly be ashamed, that we have not better learned the principles of our religion? Have we properly understood, who the Saviour is, and what the purposes, for which he came into the world? Have we beheld the glory of the Father so displayed in the person of the Son, as to be convinced that their nature and perfections are the same? And is not this a firm foundation for our hopes, a source of strong consolation? For do we not now perceive, that our concerns may be safely intrusted in the hands of Jesus?

But have we indeed approached unto God, through the mediation of Christ? Or shall we presume to draw near to him in any other way? Who shall open the kingdom of heaven for us? Shall we plead our own obedience, as if this would procure us admission? The door would be barred against us; nor can any entrance be obtained, but through the sacrifice, and intercession of Him, who has returned to those blissful mansions, from which he came down. He is gone to prepare a place, not for his Apostles only, but for all who believe in his name. You, therefore, who have fixed

your whole dependence upon him, are encouraged to rejoice in his exalted dignity, and the certainty of final salvation. It is your privilege, though you are now despised and afflicted, to look forward with exultation "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you *." For yet a little while, and He, in whom you trust, shall appear in his glory, and take you up with great triumph to his beatific presence, where you shall admire, and love, and praise him for ever.

The Saviour proceeded to comfort his disciples: "Distressed as you may be at my departure, I solemnly assure you, that in consequence thereof you will obtain peculiar advantages. By virtue of my intercession, while you exercise a firm dependence upon me, you shall be enabled to perform miraculous operations, equal or superior to those, which I myself have wrought †. Nor is this too much for you to expect:

* 1 Pet i 4.

† The Apostles not only expelled demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, as Jesus had done, but dispensed spiritual gifts to immense numbers, spake various languages, which they had never learned, and preached the Gospel with a success amazingly rapid and extensive. These were, in some sense, more illustrious effects, than attended the ministry of our Lord: and yet this consideration does not weaken the argument for his Divinity, taken from his works, but rather strengthen it. For these very things were accomplished, as appears in the passage before us, by the power of the Saviour: and accordingly, the Apostles, in the miracles which they performed, confessed their dependence upon him, and ascribed the whole glory to him. They could not speak, as he did, "I say unto thee, Arise," but "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk;" and again, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." Luke vii. 14. viii. 54. Acts iii. 6. ix. 34.

only

only preſent your ſupplications to God in faith, and, by the energy of my own power, I will beſtow the bleſſings, which you aſk, that the glory of the Father may be diſplayed in the mediation of the Son."

We, alſo, may rejoice, that Jeſus, who is gone into heaven, continues mindful of his Church on earth, and is inceſſantly pouring down his benefits upon it. We ſhould be thankful for thoſe extraordinary communications vouchſafed to the Apoſtles, whereby the Goſpel was firſt propagated, and confirmed with unqueſtionable evidence. Let us likewiſe be encouraged, by the prevalency of the interceſſion of our exalted High Prieſt, to offer up our requeſts with humble boldneſs. For the promiſe reaches even unto us, "If ye ſhall aſk any thing in my name, I will do it." Ah! why are we ſo backward to pray, as if we had no Advocate with the Father, or as if this Advocate had no merit to plead, poſſeſſed no influence, and could exert no power on our behalf? Let us not ſo diſhonour him, but, crediting his declarations, let us ſurround the throne of grace with our importunate petitions, and ſpread our wants before him. He is able, and he is equally willing, to ſupply all our neceſſities.

It is probable, that the Apoſtles expreſſed a peculiar warmth of affection for their dear Lord, who was about to be taken from them, and that with a reference to their profeſſions of regard he thus continued his diſcourſe:- "Let your love appear in your uniform obedience to my injunctions; and, though I ſhall withdraw from you, I will entreat the Father, that you may

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enjoy the conſolations of his Spirit, and that for ever. The men of the world, with ſuch carnal ſentiments and diſpoſitions, as predominate in their minds, cannot admit this divine Viſitant; but you are already acquainted with his influences, and ſhall receive more abundant communications from him. I will not, therefore, totally and finally deſert you, but will return to you in the power of the Holy Ghoſt. My bodily preſence will be ſoon removed from the earth, but, through faith, you may ſtill behold me ever near you; and as I am poſſeſſed of endleſs life, ſo, by virtue of your union with me, you ſhall maintain a ſtate of ſpiritual vigour, and be conducted to the everlaſting felicities of heaven. That promiſed effuſion of the Spirit will convince you more fully, that I am joined not only to my Father, but to yourſelves alſo, by an indiſſoluble bond. You muſt be reminded, however, that he only, who ſhews a conſtant deſire and endeavour to perform whatever I have commanded, is acknowledged to give a deciſive proof of his regard. He is the perſon who ſhall obtain unequivocal marks of my Father's favour, as well as of my warmeſt attachment, and who, likewiſe, ſhall receive from me a clear diſcovery of my glorious character."

Judas, one of the twelve, but not the traitor, expreſſed his aſtoniſhment, that ſuch a diſcovery ſhould be deſigned for them, and not extended to the world at large. He enquired, how it could be: when Jeſus immediately reſumed his affectionate addreſs: "The man, who is influenced by a ſincere love to me, will neceſſarily yield an unfeigned ſubmiſſion to my authority:

thority: and, as he will be the object of my Father's complacency and delight, we will together visit him, and take up our residence within him. An enmity of heart, indeed, would lead to an entire rejection of my words: but, as I declare the will of Jehovah, the God of Hosts, every contemptuous unbeliever will be left without excuse. Such are the instructions, which I have delivered, during my personal ministry among you. And now, though I am departing, the Holy Ghost shall be sent to supply my place: he shall give you a clear conception of divine truth, and revive in your memories every doctrine, which you have heard from me."

"Here, then, I take my leave, with a declaration of my best wishes for you. Peace, the most valuable blessing, I bequeath to you: peace, which I have procured by my blood, and which can be communicated only by my grace, I bestow upon you. This is what the world cannot impart: their professions of good will are, in general, empty flatteries and compliments; they confer no real satisfaction; and are extremely changeable. Far different is my solemn benediction, which I pronounce in the sincerity of my heart, which carries an efficacy with it to promote your happiness, and which I will never revoke. On these grounds, your fears may be dispersed, and your minds composed and comforted."

"You will, therefore, receive the most ample benefits from my departure; and on my account, as well as your own, you may be glad at my removal, since I am quitting my present state of humiliation and dis-

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treſs, and returning to my Father, who is exalted in bliſs and glory, far beyond what I poſſeſs in this life. I have warned you of the events, which are about to take place, that you may not be ſtaggered by them, but rather confirmed in the faith. I ſhall not have time to add much more: for I am juſt entering upon a painful conflict with Satan, who has uſurped the dominion of the world. But I dread not his malice, as there is nothing in my nature, which can favour his aſſaults, or give him an advantage over me. I ſubmit to this oppoſition, that I may publicly teſtify my regard to the Father, and my readineſs to fulfil all my engagements with him: and now I haſten to do my laſt work upon earth."

And what do we learn from this affecting diſcourſe? Does it not excite in us the moſt fervent love to the Saviour? Let us not forget, that he requires obedience, as the teſt of our love. Do we not perceive the excellence and happineſs of his ſervice? Do we not long for the manifeſtation of the divine favour, which he promiſes to his faithful people? Surely, it ought to afford us the ſtrongeſt conſolation, that Jeſus, who was dead, is alive again, and that he is gone into heaven, to carry on his deſigns of mercy for us. Nay, he is ſtill ever preſent with his Church, and pledges himſelf for the ſecurity of every true believer. The light, and ſtrength, and joy of his Spirit, are vouchſafed to all his ſincere diſciples, even to the end of time: the Comforter will "abide with us for ever." Let us plead with him theſe gracious declarations: let us implore that peace, which is his own moſt valuable legacy,

and requeſt, that, ſince he hath overcome Satan, he would enable us to ſuſtain the conflict, and bring us off "more than conquerors," to the praiſe of his great name.

After the ſolemn addreſs, which we have conſidered, our Lord propoſed to retire; but, probably making a pauſe before he quitted the room, he renewed his exhortations to the Apoſtles. To ſhew them the neceſſity of continual dependence on him, he repreſented himſelf and his Church under the ſimilitude of a vine, planted and cultivated by a wiſe and careful huſbandman *. He is the root and ſtock of the tree, and his profeſſing people are its branches. Some, which are beautifully adorned with leaves, produce no fruit. Theſe are cut off, and conſigned to the flames, as fit only to be uſed for fuel. Such is the ſtate and character of merely nominal Chriſtians, and ſuch will be their final deſtruction. They are members of the viſible Church; their appearances are fair and promiſing, but their barrenneſs witneſſes againſt them; and therefore they are "nigh unto curſing, whoſe end is to be burned †."

There are, however, branches of another ſort, truly excellent and valuable, which, in conſequence of nouriſhment derived from the root, bear a large increaſe. Such, our Lord teſtified, were all the Apoſtles, after Judas had withdrawn from the company. Such likewiſe are all true believers: by faith they are joined to the Saviour, and from that union they receive an influence, which renders them, though in different

* John xv. 1, &c. † Heb. vi. 8.

degrees, " fruitful in every good work." To Him, therefore, all their attainments and ufefulnefs are afcribed: left to themfelves, or feparated from him, they are no more productive of good, than the branches of the vine, when cut off from the ftock. But, whilft they maintain a conftant regard to Jefus, they preferve their fpiritual life, and make advancement in holinefs.

Yet even thefe valuable branches ftand in need of being pruned; for, unlefs the luxuriant parts be taken off, the fruit will degenerate. For this very purpofe, therefore, the care of the hufbandman is exercifed. O what fharp operations does it require, to lop off thofe excrefcences, which fhoot forth even from eminent believers! The Lord, who loves them, will not fpare them, but appoint the heavieft afflictions, with no other defign than to render them more pure, and, of confequence, more honourable and ufeful members of his Church.

Do we perceive our own character exhibited in this parable? Have we any thing more than an external profeffion of Chriftianity? Are we " filled with the fruits of righteoufnefs, which are by Jefus Chrift unto the glory and praife of God * ?" Or how do we expect to do good? Is there any other way, than through a vital union with the Saviour? No: he himfelf declared our utter inability, when he faid, " Without me ye can do nothing." Let us confefs our weaknefs, and implore his help. May he attach our hearts to himfelf, and communicate fuch fupplies of grace,

* Phil. i. 11.

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as may enable us to adorn our holy calling! Be it our concern, to maintain our faith, and cultivate an intercourse with him day by day. Yet, even then, severe trials may be necessary for us. Let us not shrink from them, but pray only, that they may accomplish in us the desired effects. How blessed will be the consequences of such an adherence to Christ! We shall be imboldened to approach him with confidence; for he has engaged to answer our petitions. By our consistent and honourable deportment, the God, whom we serve, will be glorified, since it will appear from us, not only that he is "rich in mercy," but that he "loveth righteousness." This also will contribute essentially to our own comfort, as affording the strongest evidence, that we are the disciples of Jesus.

Our Lord, therefore, earnestly pressed upon his Apostles such a practical regard to duty: "As I am the object of my Father's complacency and delight, so do I feel the most affectionate attachment to you. It should be your aim and endeavour to walk in a state of holy intimacy with me; which can be effected only by your ready compliance with all my injunctions, even as I have yielded a constant and universal obedience to the injunctions of my Father. In these exhortations I am the more urgent, that I may receive continual satisfaction from you, and that your happiness in me may be completed."

"One commandment, in particular, I again enforce upon you; which is, that you bear the most fervent love one towards another. In this, you have only to imi-

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tate that kindneſs, which I have ſhewn to you. No higher inſtance of benevolence can be produced, than a man's offering up himſelf to die on behalf of his friends. As my friends I ſhall regard you, while you pay a due deference to my authority, and obey my precepts. I treat you not as inferior domeſtics, who are to be kept at a diſtance, but as the partners of my counſels, to whom I have communicated whatever I have received in charge from my Father. To this honourable ſituation you have been called, not by your previous choice of me, but by my free and ſovereign mercy towards you: and I have appointed you to your ſacred function, that you may be extenſively uſeful, and that the benefits of your miniſtry may reach through many generations. Such alſo are my gracious engagements with you, that you may expect an anſwer to your largeſt petitions in my name. I require only, that you ſhew your gratitude and obedience, by maintaining a mutual and ardent affection for one another."

And is it of no concern to us, what the Saviour preſſed upon his Apoſtles? Were they ſtrictly enjoined to continue in the love of their Maſter; and are we at liberty to neglect and deſpiſe him? Should not his unparalleled kindneſs in dying for us, as well as for them, excite us to admire, and praiſe, and ſerve him? We had deſerved the divine indignation and wrath; but, by virtue of his oblation, we may now be admitted to the moſt honourable privileges. We alſo, like the Apoſtles, are received into a ſtate of holy friendſhip with our Lord, if indeed we believe in his name; and

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to us he condefcends to make known the myfteries of his kingdom. Surely, we fhall not hefitate to fay, The Lord hath done it, not for our righteoufnefs, but of his own abundant grace. Yet we fhould remember, that the end of our election and feparation from the world, is, that we may produce the fruits of righteoufnefs. Is this our aim and defire? To inftance in the particular duty, fo much infifted on; do we poffefs and cultivate brotherly love? If otherwife, where is our religion; where our knowledge, and imitation of Chrift? Can it be allowable for us, any more than for the firft Chriftians, to "bite and devour one another?" You, therefore, who "have bitter envying and ftrife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not againft the truth *," for you are ftrangers to the power of the Gofpel.

Jefus proceeded in his exhortation to his Apoftles, that he might prepare them for the oppofition, which awaited them: "However unexceptionable and benevolent your fpirit and conduct may be, you need not wonder, if you be marked out as objects of general deteftation; fince you have feen me treated in the fame manner. If, indeed, you were conformed to the principles and practices of the world, you might conciliate their favour; but, as you differ from them fo widely, in confequence of your being feparated by my grace, you will excite their difguft. Still you fhould not complain, but be fatisfied, when you recollect, that you meet with no worfe reception than

* James iii. 14.

your great Maſter did. Perſecutions will be raiſed againſt you on my account, through an ignorance of God and of his Chriſt. Be not tempted to comply with your enemies, or envy them their triumph; for their caſe is deplorably wretched. As I have ſo long preached amongſt them, and confirmed my doctrines with unparalleled miracles, they can ſet up no plea in their own defence. For now it appears, that in rejecting me they reſiſt the God of heaven, who hath borne his teſtimony to me. Yet, even by this unreaſonable and baſe oppoſition, they fulfil their own ſcriptures, which have foretold it *."

"My cauſe, however, ſhall proſper, notwithſtanding the violence of adverſaries. The abundant effuſion of the Spirit, whom I will ſend down from the Father, upon my return to him, ſhall afford the moſt convincing evidence of the truth of the Goſpel. You alſo, my choſen witneſſes, whom I have trained up for the miniſtry, ſhall be ſo ſtrengthened and imboldened to preach the faith, that your enemies will be confounded, and multitudes of converts added to my Church."

What influence, then, do we draw from this part of the exhortation? If the religion of Jeſus be the ſame, as in primitive times, may not ſimilar conſequences be expected? The external profeſſion, indeed, as it is general among us, expoſes no man to contempt: but the life and power of it would ſtill render us unfaſhionable, and offenſive to thoſe, who

* Pſal. xxxv. 19.

are governed by the maxims and cuſtoms of the world. This is not to be avoided, even by the moſt prudent and exemplary Chriſtians. The zealous followers of Jeſus will be hated, in a meaſure, as he was, and for that very reaſon, becauſe they reſemble Him. Does this diſcourage us? Or do we complain of the terms? Are we, then, inclined to join the ſociety of thoſe, who ſcoff at all ſerious attention to ſpiritual things, or, at leaſt, who care not for them? Let us deliberate well. What will the iſſue be? Would not ſuch a conduct imply a decided oppoſition to the Saviour? And, conſidering the inſtructions and admonitions given us, would not our ſin be unpardonable? Let us rather, therefore, meet the frowns of men, than provoke the vengeance of Almighty God.

The promulgation of the Goſpel, through the effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt and the labours of the Apoſtles, has been anſwerable to the prediction. But are we ourſelves brought under its influence? Every true diſciple, even now, will be able to bear witneſs for Chriſt: what, then, is our teſtimony concerning him? Can we tell of his power, faithfulneſs, and love, from our own experience, and recommend his ſervice to all, from what we have known of its bleſſedneſs? Atteſtations of this nature, from private and obſcure Chriſtians, might have the happieſt effects, in ſilencing the objections of infidels, and reconciling many to the principles which they deſpiſe. May Jeſus, our exalted Lord, ſend down a more abundant meaſure of

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his Spirit upon us, that his cauſe may be revived, his Church enlarged, and his people animated with increaſing confidence and joy in his ways, to the glory of his own name here and hereafter to all eternity! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 38.

Jesus concluded his addreſs to his Apoſtles, with a prediction of their ſufferings, a promiſe of the Spirit, and an aſſurance of his own return—offered up a fervent prayer, for himſelf, his Apoſtles, and all believers.

WHATEVER the Saviour felt on his own account, in the view of his approaching ſufferings, he was moſt deeply affected, as we have ſeen, for the diſtreſſed ſtate, in which he was about to leave his beloved Apoſtles. The paſchal ſupper, of which they had been partakers together, was the laſt meal in which they were to enjoy the communion of the ſame table, before his death; and afforded the laſt opportunity for exhortation and counſel. A farewel, at the moment of final ſeparation, is always attended, where the bonds of union in life have been dear and ſacred, with peculiar circumſtances of ſolemnity, tenderneſs, and grief. It was now, that the love of the Saviour broke forth, reſembling that which a parent expreſſes for his children, who are ſoon to be expoſed, as helpleſs orphans, to extreme calamities and dangers. He proceeded like ſuch a counſellor, to inſtruct, warn, and comfort them *.

* John xvi. 1.

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"I have given you, my faithful followers, previous intimations of the formidable opposition, which you will have to encounter, in order that, being prepared, you may not be shaken in your minds, or induced to desert my cause, when you enter upon the sharp conflict. Your enemies will persecute you with a rage so blind and furious, that, while they excommunicate you, and even put you to death, they will consider themselves as performing a religious service, and bringing glory to God. This will arise from their ignorance of the righteous character of my Father, as well as of my peculiar office and dignity. In your deep distresses you will recollect my predictions, and find in them a confirmation of your faith. It was the less necessary to give you these notices before, as I have hitherto been your constant companion, ready to suggest all proper counsel and direction, as circumstances occurred."

Such was the prophecy of Jesus, and we learn from the history of the Apostles, that it was exactly verified. They, who ought to have been received "as an Angel of God," met with general scorn and detestation, as if they were unworthy to live; and many of them suffered death in its most dreadful forms, while their persecutors pleaded a regard to conscience and religion. We read of similar events in other ages of the Church; and at the present day, though violence is restrained and loud professions of candour and liberality are made, it is obvious, that fervent zeal for the honour of our Redeemer would expose us to contempt. And do not many among us, through the fear of difficulties, decline

those pious exertions, which they acknowledge to be requisite? Or, if we "suffer for righteousness' sake," are we not offended, and almost induced to desert the service? Have we, then, forgotten the declarations of Jesus? Or have they not taught us to expect the enmity of the world, if we would be the friends of God? If real godliness produced no opposition, how would the scriptures be fulfilled? But matter of fact abundantly confirms their truth, and should establish us in the belief and love of the Gospel.

The Apostles were too much oppressed by the intimations of their Lord's departure, to propose any further enquiries upon the subject. But he proceeded to suggest such considerations, as might relieve and comfort them. "However painful my removal may be to you, it is highly requisite on your own account; for you could not otherwise obtain the influences of the Holy Ghost. But now, in consequence of my death, this divine Agent shall descend upon you, and give an amazing efficacy to your ministrations.' By his mighty operations, the world will be convinced of the guilt, which consists in unbelief and rejection of me. He will teach men the nature and sufficiency of my righteousness, from my return to my Father at the completion of my work, and in the overthrow and dethronement of Satan exhibit a proof of the judgment with which I am intrusted."

"Many things yet remain to be more clearly unfolded to you, but for the present, through the erroneous sentiments and strong prejudices which possess your minds, you are indisposed to receive them. The

Spirit,

Spirit, who will be your guide and teacher, will effectually dispel the darkness from your minds, and reveal the whole system of divine truth: and his declarations should be regarded as coming with authority from heaven. He will discover future events; but his peculiar office will be to give you clearer and more honourable conceptions of my character and salvation, by exhibiting to your view those glorious perfections, which I possess in the same extent as the Father."

Here let us pause, and contemplate the Saviour's promises, from which we may derive the strongest consolation. However we may be inclined to lament his removal from the earth, we may rejoice in those inestimable benefits, which his death has procured. In particular, the influences of the Spirit are bestowed upon the Church, as the fruit and purchase of his sacrifice. It is allowed, that these influences were communicated to the Apostles in an extraordinary measure, and the peculiar circumstances of their situation rendered them expedient. But the Spirit yet continues to execute his office by his common operations, according to our Lord's description. He it is, who arrests the careless sinner, and fixes upon him a deep conviction of guilt, especially for his contempt of the grace of the Gospel. He gives the knowledge of salvation, by exhibiting to the view of the mind the perfect obedience of Christ. And He also directs the attention to the same exalted Personage, in the character of the Almighty Governor and universal Judge. May these effects accompany the labours of faithful ministers in the present day! For thus only "the word

word of God is quick, and powerful, and ſharper than any two-edged ſword *:" thus only will it "have free courſe and be glorified †."

It was promiſed to the Apoſtles, that their ignorance and prejudice ſhould be removed by further degrees of illumination, particularly by larger diſcoveries of the dignity of the Redeemer, and of the bleſſings which he beſtows. We alſo ſtand in need of, and are encouraged to ſolicit and expect, the ſame gracious aſſiſtance. Have we no miſtakes to be corrected, no wrong affections to be ſubdued? Let us pray, that the Holy Ghoſt, who is the author of all ſpiritual light and life, may "guide us into all truth." We look not for infallibility, or the gift of prophecy: but we may offer up the moſt fervent ſupplications, "That the God of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wiſdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of our underſtanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the ſaints ‡."

Upon our Lord's intimating to his Apoſtles, that he ſhould ſoon depart and go to the Father, and return after a ſhort interval, they were at a loſs to comprehend his meaning. He declared, therefore, more explicitly, that though diſtreſs and anguiſh were coming upon them, ſharp as the pangs of childbirth, yet as theſe are ſucceeded by ſenſations of peculiar delight after a ſafe delivery, ſo their grief ſhould be followed by a ſtate of laſting joy, inaſmuch as he would viſit

* Heb. iv. 12. † 2 Theſſ. iii. 1. ‡ Eph. i. 17, 18.

them

them again. Doubtless, he intended to suggest, that by his appearance, upon his resurrection from the dead, he would disperse their fears, establish their hopes and comforts, and render them dauntless under future trials. Yet it is probable, that he had a reference to his final advent, when all his people shall behold his glory. Then, in the highest sense of the words, they shall meet him "with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*." What strong consolation does this administer to believers! Under your severest calamities, look forwards to your Lord's return, with holy exultation, for "He shall wipe away all tears from your eyes †." If he should thus intimate his intention, "Surely, I come quickly;" it is your privilege to reply, "Amen: even so come, Lord Jesus ‡."

The Saviour reminded his Apostles, that, though his bodily presence should be withdrawn from them, they should be so much more enlightened, as not to stand in need of the same familiar converse with him. Some degree of obscurity rested upon his instructions during his personal continuance among them; but he promised to give them by his Spirit the most explicit declarations of the divine will. He pressed upon them the necessity of prayer, and taught them especially to maintain an entire dependence upon his merits and mediation, in all their addresses to the Father; which they had not, till that time, been instructed to do in so express a manner. He added,

* Isa. xxxv. 10. † Rev. vii. 17. ‡ xxii. 20.

likewise,

likewife, the moft gracious affurances, that their petitions, being offered up through faith in his name, would certainly obtain a favourable acceptance, and enfure the completion of their wifhes. This efficacy he taught them to afcribe, not only to his interceffion, but to the ftrong affection, which the Father himfelf bore towards them for their warm and faithful attachment to him. He repeated it, therefore, for their encouragement, that he was then about to return to that high and glorious Perfonage, whofe love for them was the fame as his own.

The clear and precious difcoveries, which the Saviour promifed, the Apoftles actually received; and we, at this very day, enjoy the benefits of their illumination. Let us value thofe authentic records, in which they have unfolded to our view the revelation of divine truth, fo wonderfully communicated to them. But let us not forget our need of prayer, and the great advantages attending the right performance of this duty. We, alfo, are allowed a free accefs to God in the name of Jefus. Are we making ufe of the privilege? Are we imploring fpiritual bleffings with all that fervour, which a full conviction of their value would produce? Do we exercife an unfeigned reliance upon our exalted Interceffor? And can we, through him, approach to God, as to a loving Father, with confidence and joy? This is the temper and conduct, to which a firm belief of the Gofpel will infallibly lead.

After thefe declarations of Jefus, the Apoftles profeffed to have received entire fatisfaction, and an affured

aſſured perſuaſion of his high character and divine original. But alas! they were not ſufficiently aware of their own weakneſs. He warned them, that, ſtrong as their faith might ſeem, the hour was at hand, when they would all be ſo ſhaken in their principles as to deſert him: yet, notwithſtanding their treachery, he rejoiced that he ſhould be ſupported by virtue of his union with the Father. It is not wrong to declare, what are our views of Chriſt, and what affections we feel towards him: but the ſolemn admonition, here given, teaches us not to boaſt of the clearneſs of our knowledge or the warmth of our attachment. We may ſoon be brought into ſuch trials, as may ſtagger and confound us, and, for a ſeaſon at leaſt, be "moved away from the hope of the Goſpel," as if we had found the whole ſyſtem a deluſion. It will be our wiſdom, as well as duty, under a diffidence of ourſelves, to rely upon the grace of God, which alone can preſerve us, and to pray, "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live; and let me not be aſhamed of my hope *."

Yet we admire the forbearance and tenderneſs of Jeſus, even in the view of their inconſtancy. He did not frown upon them, but encouraged them by an aſſurance, that, through faith in his name, they ſhould ſtill poſſeſs a conſtant ſource of peace, and an antidote to the cup of tribulation, which the world would ſoon give them to drink. And, while he warned them to look for ſevere oppoſition and ſharp diſtreſs from its aſſaults, he cloſed his addreſs with ex-

* Pſal. cxix. 116.

horting them to maintain a holy cheerfulneſs and courage, in full dependence upon Him their victorious Leader. It is the will of Jeſus, then, that his fainting people ſhould be comforted; and even that thoſe, who have betrayed an unſteadineſs in his ſervice, ſhould not deſpond, but be induced to return, and truſt in his love. O, how large are his compaſſions!

We aſk, What are your expectations of happineſs? Are you ſeeking it in preſent things? Alas! you will be miſerably diſappointed: Jeſus alone can beſtow the precious treaſure, nor will you ever obtain it, till you be willing to receive it at his hands. You cannot enjoy his favour and that of the world together. If you follow him with fidelity and zeal, you muſt prepare to meet reſiſtance, and arm yourſelves for a ſevere conflict. He, however, whom you ſerve, has already overcome your enemies; and you may rejoice in this confidence, that they ſhall be ſubdued under your feet, becauſe they are fallen under His. O deſert not his ſtandard, and you ſhall ſoon ſhare in the honours of his triumph, and ſit down with him in his kingdom!

He had concluded his farewell addreſs to his beloved attendants, and was now on the point of departing. But, that no proof might be wanting of his paternal regards, and nothing omitted which could ſoothe the pangs of ſeparation, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and with fervent interceſſions commended to God the Father his adopted children *. John, who was then preſent, has recorded the prayer; and it remains an

* John xvii. 1, &c.

everlaſting

everlasting monument of the strong and invariable attachment of Christ to his Church, and ensures the Providence, which shall save it from the malice of men and devils. It was also adapted to his own peculiar circumstances, who had but a few hours more to live in the world; and his conduct on that occasion teaches us to wait for our great change in the exercise of ardent devotion. It appears, indeed, as we have observed, to have been dictated by a tender regard to the situation of his Apostles, who, perplexed and tempted as they were, stood in need of all that protection, support, and comfort, which he solicited his Father to grant them. The prayer, however, may likewise be considered, as a pattern of that prevailing intercession which he carries on in heaven, and which he will continue to offer to the end of time, for the benefit of every member of his Church.

There are those, who represent it as inconsistent with the doctrine of his Godhead, that he should ever be a supplicant. But they seem willing to forget that part of the Christian's creed, which maintains, that Jesus was very man as well as very God; that as man he was required "to fulfil all righteousness," and therefore among other duties to perform that of prayer. Besides, in that state of humiliation, being a partaker of our weaknesses, he had occasion to implore assistance from above, even as we ourselves; and he received that assistance in answer to his own petitions. Yet in his remarkable address to Heaven, which we now proceed to consider, he discovers a superior dignity. The language is such, as a mere man cannot adopt;

adopt; it will not ſuit any other than Him, who is our IMMANUEL, poſſeſſed of two natures, "God manifeſt in the fleſh."

He began with a requeſt for himſelf. He could not be unmindful of his own ſituation, with which ſuch important events were connected. As he was about to cloſe his work on earth, it was his earneſt deſire to be ſo ſupported, that the concluſion might be truly honourable. The grand, deciſive hour was at hand, on which the whole of his mediatorial undertaking depended: anxious, therefore, for the glory of God and the ſalvation of his people, he prayed, that he might be ſuſtained in the conflict, and crowned with victory. This he ſolicited and obtained. A divine power attended him in his deepeſt humiliation: an Angel appeared to ſtrengthen him in the garden; his enemies were ſtruck to the ground; his very judge teſtified his innocence; the converſion of a dying ſinner gave a luſtre to his croſs; the heavens were darkened, the earth ſhook, the veil of the temple was rent, and the graves opened, in anſwer to this requeſt, that the dignity of the Saviour might be atteſted. Doubtleſs, he had a view likewiſe to thoſe ſubſequent events, his reſurrection and aſcenſion, the miraculous effuſion of the Spirit, and the efficacious influence of the Goſpel: and theſe alſo have ſignally diſplayed his high character.

He conſidered himſelf in poſſeſſion of univerſal dominion to be exerciſed with an eſpecial regard to the ſalvation of his people, according to the divine Covenant. To this end, it was neceſſary for them

them to be brought to the knowledge of the true God, and of the ſcheme of Redemption through the Son. Having invariably purſued the great plan intruſted to him, and being about to perfect his engagements by the ſacrifice of himſelf, he petitioned that he might again be admitted to participate of all that ſplendour of Deity, which he had enjoyed from everlaſting in union with the Father, and of which he had diveſted himſelf that he might take up his abode upon earth.—He is now returned to that exalted ſtate, from which he deſcended: and ſurely, according to this deſcription, it is meet that we adore him as our Lord and our God. A mere creature, or One raiſed to be God, as ſome vainly talk, could not ſpeak thus; ſince whatever glory he now poſſeſſes in heaven, he did poſſeſs before there was any creation. The doctrine is myſterious, but we rejoice in it, as laying a firm foundation for our faith and hope.

In this addreſs of Jeſus to his Father, he bore upon his heart the caſe of his dear followers, and eſpecially of his choſen Apoſtles. He appears, indeed, to have been more ſolicitous for them, than for himſelf; ſo that, even in the mention of his own concerns, he had a view to their benefit. His diſciples were his peculiar charge; they had been committed to him by expreſs Covenant; he had gradually trained them up for his ſervice, and faithfully inſtructed them in the divine will. They, on their part, had believed his declarations, underſtood his character, and ſteadfaſtly attached themſelves to his

caufe. This he reprefented, while he interceded for them, exclufively of others who knew him not. He pleaded, that they were the objects of his Father's peculiar choice and love, as well as of his own. He argued, that in this refpect there could be no difference between him and the Father, and that, as they poffeff-ed the fame perfections, their counfels muft accord, and the fame perfons be equally dear to them both. Being therefore about to depart, he folemnly commended his favoured attendants to the care of his God, and prayed, that, for the honour of his name, they might be preferved from the fnares, to which they were expofed, and be knit together by an indiffoluble union of affection.

He had watched over them during his refidence amongft them, and had kept them in the faith; fo that Judas only had apoftatized, according to the predictions of the fcripture. And now, upon returning to his Father, he offered up thefe petitions in their prefence, that their happinefs in him might be confirmed and completed. He obferved, that, as they had received his doctrine, and, like him, differed fo widely in conduct and fpirit from the world, they were generally rejected with abhorrence, and no other treatment could be looked for. He was not folicitous, that they fhould be immediately taken to heaven, merely to avoid the violence of perfecution: he knew, that it was expedient for them to remain longer upon earth; but he prayed moft fervently, that they might not be overcome by temptation, or betrayed into difhonourable conduct. He requefted, that, while they

feparated

ſeparated from ſinners, they might be continually advancing in real holineſs, through the powerful energy of divine truth upon their minds. For this purpoſe he pleaded the importance of their office, as they were his ambaſſadors, appointed to promote the grand object of his own miſſion: and he expreſſed his deſire, that, as he devoted himſelf to his work with a view to their ſpiritual good, they might receive more abundant grace, and feel the ſanctifying influence of that Goſpel, which they were about to preach.

What do we learn from all this? Among other things, we cannot but remark the earneſt concern of Jeſus for the intereſt of true religion. Theſe his dear ſervants, ſo commiſſioned, obtained a peculiar honour; and to the prevalency of this interceſſion, not to any natural excellence or ſuperiority in them, we muſt aſcribe their ardent zeal, their unſhaken confidence, their exemplary holineſs, and amazing ſucceſs. Let their hiſtory, from the day of Pentecoſt, teſtify, how fully his prayers were anſwered. We rejoice that he ſtill ſends out miniſters, for the enlargement and edification of his Church, that he is ſolicitous to preſerve and bleſs them by his grace, and gives efficacy to their labours. They ſhould ſeriouſly contemplate the character of the Apoſtles as here ſtated by their Lord, that they may judge what manner of perſons they themſelves ought to be. It is expedient for them, doubtleſs, as it was for the Apoſtles, to be cordially attached to the Saviour, and to poſſeſs an eminent meaſure of divine knowledge, faith, and holineſs;

and it is equally neceſſary to pray, that they may be kept from the evil of the world, united together in love, and ſanctified through the truth, which they preach. Let them, therefore, commend their cauſe to Jeſus, who, as their Advocate in heaven, will plead for them, and they ſhall receive ſufficient grace, as the fruit of his mediation.

But private Chriſtians, as well as miniſters, may derive encouragement from this ſolemn interceſſion of Jeſus. They are all dear to him; nor can he ever be unmindful of their intereſts. Accordingly, he extended his petitions in behalf of all thoſe, who, in every age and country, ſhould be induced by the doctrine of the Apoſtles to place their unfeigned reliance upon Him. How important to each of us is this declaration! We are favoured with an authentic account of thoſe truths, which the Apoſtles taught: but have we been ſo influenced by their word, as to believe in the Saviour? If it appear, that we poſſeſs this faith, then we may conclude, that he pleaded for us, and that "he offered up prayers and ſupplications with ſtrong crying" on our behalf. Let us carefully remark the bleſſings, which he has implored, and expect to receive them.

He prayed, that all his people might be joined together as one body, partaking of the ſame Spirit, and dwelling in the Father and the Son, by a divine and myſterious union, even reſembling that which ſubſiſts between the perſons of the Godhead. This requeſt he urged with peculiar earneſtneſs, obſerving, that he beſtowed his grace upon them with a view

to

to that very end, and that their close and affectionate attachment to each other would afford a strong evidence to the world of the truth of his mission, and of the love of God towards them. Are we aware of the importance of maintaining this Christian concord? And do we carefully avoid whatever may prevent or interrupt it? Are peace and harmony among the different members of the Church the most forcible recommendation of our religion? Alas! how much cause we have to lament, that it is exposed to the scorn of infidels, by the bitter contentions, which have so generally prevailed! Or, how can it appear, that we are the objects of the divine complacency, while we are malicious and vindictive? O may the Saviour impart to us a more abundant measure of his Spirit, and thereby unite us to himself and to each other in the bonds of love, to the praise of his own grace, and our unspeakable consolation!

Jesus looked forward to the eternal world, and prayed, not only for the credit of religion, and the happiness of his people in this life, but for the consummation of their bliss and glory in his immediate presence for ever. This he claimed rather than requested, even demanding their final salvation on the ground of the Father's engagements, and everlasting delight in him. Let us contemplate with admiration, gratitude, and joy, the declaration of our Redeemer's will, as here expressed. It may justly inspire us with hope and confidence. If we are believers indeed, we shall behold his glory; for that state of exaltation has been prepared for us from the foundation of the

world. Such is his counſel of mercy, which ſhall not be fruſtrated.

Jeſus cloſed the ſolemn interceſſion, by commending to the care of the Father his choſen Apoſtles, as diſtinguiſhed from others by their knowledge of his truth; expreſſing at the ſame time an earneſt deſire, that they might continue to be favoured with an abiding ſenſe of the love of God, and engaging himſelf to take up his reſidence within them.—Through the whole of this ſcene, the Redeemer is exhibited in the moſt endearing light; and, from the view of his compaſſion and faithfulneſs, we may be imboldened to truſt ourſelves under his care. He is "the ſame yeſterday, and to day, and for ever*." He, who was ſo ſolicitous, for the perſeverance and happineſs of his ancient diſciples, will not forget or neglect the leaſt and meaneſt of his ſervants in the preſent day. To all of them, without exception, he has ſaid, "I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee †." Let us rejoice in the fulneſs of his grace, and long for the promiſed viſion of his glory.

But does the benefit of this interceſſion extend to every reader? If carnal affections predominate in your hearts, and you feel no cordial attachment to the Saviour, you have "neither part nor lot in this matter." He ſaid, "I pray not for the world:" and does not that diſtinction exclude you, remaining as you are? What, then, will you do without his favour? Whatever temporal advantages you may now poſſeſs, you cannot inherit his kingdom; but

* Heb. xiii. 8. † xiii. 5.

if

if you die in unbelief, you will be driven away with ſhame and everlaſting contempt. As yet, however, he waits to be gracious, and commands the word of ſalvation to be preached. "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghoſt ſaith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts *."

* Heb. iii. 7, 8.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 39.

Jesus retired to Gethsemane — warned his disciples — suffered an extreme agony—was betrayed by Judas— forsaken by the other Apostles—examined before the high priest, condemned, and insulted.

ALL the preceding circumstances in the life of Jesus have been preparatory, and are to be regarded as subservient, to that important event, which we proceed to consider. He came into the world, not merely to teach, or exhibit an example of righteousness, but chiefly to suffer. Now the sharp conflict commences, now the tremendous scene is unfolded to our view. This is not a subject for amusement or curious speculation: it calls for the vigorous exercise of holy and devout affections. While we contemplate the Son of God bowed down under his accumulated trials, let us learn, what our sins required, and what a debt of gratitude we owe. O blessed Jesus, who didst stoop so low and endure so much for our salvation, help us to conceive, as we ought, of our own guilt and wretchedness, and the condescensions of thy love! Impart to us the inestimable benefits, which thou hast procured:

"By

"By thine agony and bloody ſweat, by thy croſs and paſſion,—Good Lord, deliver us *."

Jeſus, having left the gueſt chamber, departed from the city with his eleven Apoſtles towards the mount of Olives †. Upon the road thither, he warned them, that, notwithſtanding their profeſſions of regard, they would all deſert him in the hour of his extremity. According to an ancient prediction, the Shepherd being ſmitten, the ſheep ſhould be ſcattered abroad ‡. Still anxious for their encouragement, he aſſured them, that, though he ſhould be put to death, he would riſe again: inſtead of upbraiding their cowardice and unbelief, he promiſed to meet them after that event, and appointed a particular place in Galilee, where he would receive them and confirm their faith and love. Behold, how gracious the Lord is to his wavering and backſliding people! "Though they fall, they ſhall not be utterly caſt down; for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand ‖."

Not ſufficiently aware of their own weakneſs, they could not credit the declaration of their dear Maſter, and therefore ſolemnly proteſted, that they would hazard every thing, even life itſelf, in a fixed and reſolute adherence to Him. Peter, in particular, expreſſed the ſtrongeſt abhorrence of the deed: but Jeſus, who "underſtandeth our thoughts afar off," told him in reply, that that very night would witneſs the ſhaking

* Litany. † Matt. xxvi. 31—56. Mark xiv. 27—52. Luke xxii. 39—53. John xviii. 1—12. ‡ Zech. xiii. 7. ‖ Pſal. xxxvii. 24.

of

of his confidence, his repeated perjuries, and his disgraceful denial of his Master. How often are we reminded of human depravity! By numerous instances we are instructed to take heed to ourselves, to distrust our hearts, and to seek for a better security from spiritual declension, than a reliance on our own firmness and constancy.

Jesus arrived at his intended place of retirement, a garden called Gethsemane, where he had been accustomed to retreat, and had frequently passed the night in devotion. Here, probably, by prayer and meditation he meant to prepare for the approaching sufferings, of which he had a full view. When we look for uncommon difficulties, we ought to be, in a more especial manner, frequent and fervent in our applications to the throne of grace. If we thus meet our troubles, we may expect to receive all needful support and consolation.

Out of the eleven, who then attended him, our Lord selected three, Peter, James, and John. They had been favoured with the sight of his glorious transfiguration, and were now designed to be witnesses of his deep distress. With them, therefore, he retired to a separate part, and immediately began to feel an inexpressible anguish and terror. Very remarkable are the words of the Evangelists, when they attempt to describe the painful sensations, which then came upon him through an invisible influence. They imply, says the learned Bishop Pearson, that he was "suddenly, upon a present and immediate apprehension, possessed with fear, horror, and amazement, encompassed with grief, and

and overwhelmed with ſorrow, preſſed down with conſternation and dejection of mind, tormented with anxiety and diſquietude of ſpirit*."

Probably, he diſcovered inward perplexity and confuſion by his countenance. He declared to his three choſen companions, that his ſoul was beyond meaſure afflicted, and, as it were, ſurrounded with the very pains of death, and deſired, that they would continue with him in holy watchfulneſs, and pray for themſelves, that they might not be brought into the perilous conflict. He then withdrew to a little diſtance, that, being quite alone, he might pour out his heart with the greater freedom before God. He kneeled down; he fell upon his face, and requeſted, that, if it were poſſible, the extreme diſtreſs, by which he was oppreſſed, might be removed or ſhortened. He cried out, with expreſſions of ſharpeſt anguiſh, and yet of unfeigned ſubmiſſion, " O my Father, if thus thine honour can be ſecured, and the ſalvation of thy people accompliſhed, let the bitter cup, from which my nature ſhrinks, be taken from me. But I reſign myſelf to thy wiſe and ſovereign will: I decline not the work, in which I am engaged; and, therefore, let thy purpoſes be fulfilled, whatever I may ſuffer."

When he had prayed to this effect, he returned to his three diſciples, whom he found aſleep. Ah! how unmindful they were of their Lord's affliction, and of the ſolemn charge, which he had given them! Immediately he rouſed them with a ſerious, though gentle,

* Pearſon on the Creed, p. 190.

admonition,

admonition, upbraiding them all, and Peter more eſpecially, for their unwillingneſs to bear their part with him in holy vigilance, even for ſo ſhort a ſeaſon. He likewiſe repeated his former injunction, that they ſhould be upon their guard, conſider their danger, and by fervent ſupplications draw down ſtrength from heaven, againſt the hour of ſevere trial. Do we aſk, why they betrayed ſuch a backwardneſs to this neceſſary duty? The compaſſionate Jeſus accounted for it, though the reaſon does not furniſh an excuſe: "The ſpirit truly is willing, but the fleſh is weak." This clearly ſhewed the tenderneſs of his diſpoſition towards them. He uttered no peeviſh complaints of their unkindneſs, but acknowledged their cordial attachment, and lamented that their good deſires were obſtructed by the wearineſs of their bodies, and the corruption of their nature.

A ſecond time he withdrew, and offered up ſimilar petitions. He declared again his entire ſubmiſſion to the Father's will, and perfect acquieſcence with that very appointment, at which the weakneſs of humanity ſhuddered. On returning to his diſciples, he found them once more overpowered with ſleep. This ſtrange ſtupor called forth a freſh rebuke, which ſo confounded them, that they had nothing to reply; yet they were not awakened to any laſting attention. Let us be admoniſhed of our own hardneſs and inſenſibility to the agonies which purchaſed our redemption.

The Saviour retired a third time, and prayed as before. On that occaſion, it ſhould ſeem, he was juſt ſinking under the weight of his diſtreſs, when an Angel from heaven was commiſſioned to adminiſter ſupport and

and consolation. Was the struggle, then, immediately concluded? No: his consternation remained, perhaps increased: being in an agony, engaged as it were in sharp conflict, he cried to God with still greater ardour. Such was the intenseness of his soul, that his whole frame was thrown into a violent agitation. He was prostrate in the cold night, yet sweat profusely; nay, the very blood forced its way through the innumerable pores of his body, and fell in large drops upon the ground. Then, as well as at his crucifixion, that prophetical declaration was fulfilled, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels*."

Where were the disciples of Jesus, in this season of his extreme anguish? An Angel, as we have seen, was sent for his relief; but was there no earthly friend to support his drooping head? No: he had occasion to lament, that he found no comforters. Those, who made the most solemn protestations of regard, were inattentive to his distress. The three most favoured Apostles, though they had been twice before reproved for their drowsiness, had fallen asleep again. Their grief, indeed, contributed, in some measure, to produce this effect: but, doubtless, they betrayed the weakness and deficiency of their spiritual principles. He returned, repeated his reproof, and intimated, that it was too late to observe his neglected injunction, that the time for watching and prayer was expired, and that he should be immediately delivered into the hands of

* Psal. xxii. 14.

wicked

wicked men. Then, having recovered from his agony, and not dreading the event, he called upon them to arise, that they might meet the traitor, who was approaching with a band of ruffians to apprehend him.

The whole of this narration fills us with wonder, and at the same time suggests the most important instructions. We cannot but express our surprise at the conduct of the disciples, circumstanced as they were. Doubtless, they were highly blamable, in disregarding their dear Lord, when he requested their peculiar attention, and neglecting his repeated admonitions. But, while we mourn over them, relapsing into the same fault again and again, we are reminded of our own depravity, and taught not to be confident of ourselves, however sincere and earnest we may be in right principles: for, though "the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak."

Our eyes are more especially fixed upon the Saviour, who, under his unutterable anguish, exhibits a perfect pattern of patience and meekness. Let us learn to suffer with the same disposition. There are infirmities, attached to humanity, which we may feel without sin, so as to shrink under the pressure, or in the prospect, of calamities. We may, therefore, innocently desire the cup to pass from us. But we are instructed from the view of Jesus in the garden, to surrender up ourselves without reserve to the divine disposal, and to consult the glory of God and the salvation of men, rather than our own present ease and comfort. Under the most painful feelings, while we spread our case before the Lord, and entreat his gracious interposition,

we

we ſhould poſſeſs ſuch an entire reſignation, as to be able to ſay, "Not what I will, but what thou wilt." Have we attained this temper? How far otherwiſe! Do not our trials draw forth our corruption, and prove that we are very oppoſite to the mind of Chriſt? Ah! what pride and petulance, what unbelief and diſcontent, do we betray in ſharp afflictions! We are ready to quarrel with Jehovah for appointing us ſo arduous a poſt: we entertain hard thoughts of him, if deliverance be not inſtantly vouchſafed; and it ſhould ſeem, from our vehement impatience, that we could wiſh every conſideration to be ſacrificed to our own eaſe and convenience. If this be the caſe, ſurely we do not watch and pray: we are not prepared for the conflict, and a defeat may be expected.

It is enquired, What could be the occaſion of the Saviour's extreme diſtreſs and remarkable agony? There was no viſible, external cauſe of that perplexity and horror, which he diſcovered. He appears not to have ſuffered through exceſſive pain of body: nor ought we to ſuppoſe, that he was terrified, merely under the apprehenſion of approaching dangers, or that he repented of his undertaking. Never did he ſhew more diſtinguiſhed courage, or more clearly manifeſt his deſire of ſaving ſinners at any expenſe to himſelf. Yet, conſiſtently with this aſſertion, it may be allowed, that human nature, even in the holy Jeſus, might ſhudder at the proſpect of ſuch ſevere calamities.

It is ſaid, that many martyrs have poſſeſſed greater compoſure and intrepidity of mind, when they were meeting

meeting death in its moſt dreadful forms. But the compariſon ought not to be admitted, as the circumſtances are ſo widely different. Jeſus was afflicted in a way, and from cauſes, peculiar to himſelf: nor is it poſſible, that any other man could endure what was laid upon him. He ſtood as "the Repairer of the breach," to turn away from us the vengeance of our offended God, interpoſing himſelf between us and the ſtroke of juſtice. Therefore "it pleaſed the Lord to bruiſe him: He hath put him to grief*." In that view, his mind ſuffered much more than his body, and before he came to the croſs he felt inexpreſſible agonies, not merely in the proſpect of his paſſion, but from the immediate hand of God preſſing his ſpirit. In Gethſemane, then, while we accompany the Saviour bowed down under "the terrors of God," we behold the deep malignity of ſin, and perceive, that, if we ſhould anſwer for our own offences, the burden would be heavier than we could bear.

It ſhould ſeem, alſo, that Satan had conſiderable influence in producing or increaſing the diſtreſs on this remarkable occaſion. Jeſus had juſt before declared, that the malicious adverſary was preparing to attack him, and probably the fiend was then permitted to vent his utmoſt rage, and make his fierceſt onſet. But, however he might haraſs, he could not overcome; and this very conflict turned to his greater confuſion. Jeſus obtained the victory, and, as "the Captain of our Salvation," is able to deliver thoſe who are tempted.

* Iſa. liii. 10.

Only

Only let us follow his ſtandard, and we may exult in the hope of ſharing his glorious conqueſt.

At the cloſe of his agony, Jeſus had announced to his diſciples the approach of the traitor; and at that inſtant Judas came upon them with an armed company. This infamous Apoſtle had previouſly ſold his Maſter; and as he knew the place of his retirement, he now took the opportunity of conducting a large and mixed multitude of perſons, for the expreſs purpoſe of ſeizing him by force. Judas went up to addreſs him with that vile hypocriſy, which marked his character, endeavouring to conceal the baſeſt deſigns under the guiſe of friendſhip. Still profeſſing reſpect and affection, he ſaluted his Lord, and with a kiſs betrayed him into the hands of his enemies.

Was no reſiſtance made, or eſcape attempted? No: a cutting reproof was given to the traitor, for being the leader in ſuch a buſineſs and with ſuch diſſimulation; but Jeſus fled not from the danger. Though he had a clear view of all his ſufferings, he advanced with amazing fortitude towards the very men, who wiſhed to apprehend him. Having declared himſelf the perſon, whom they ſought, he diſplayed his majeſty through an inviſible influence, by which they were inſtantly confounded, and ſtruck to the ground, in his preſence. After ſo remarkable a proof of his power, it was a ſignal evidence of their obduracy, to reſume and proſecute their ſcheme. He might have eluded their purſuit; but he cheerfully ſurrendered himſelf, inſiſting only on one condition, that his diſciples might be

dismissed in safety. How kind and tender was his concern for his dear and affectionate attendants even to the last!

Jesus, the high and exalted Personage, whose name is, " King of kings, and Lord of lords," submitted to be taken into custody, and even to be bound. Amazing sight indeed! . Those, who accompanied him, proposed to resist: and Peter, with his usual forwardness, actually drew a sword in his Master's defence, and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. This was a hasty and imprudent step, for which Jesus rebuked him, observing, that such means of protection were improper in their case, and generally proved destructive. He added, that, if it had been expedient, he could easily have obtained the assistance of numerous armies of Angels, but that, with a view to fulfil the scriptures, he cheerfully acquiesced in the Father's appointment, though painful to himself.

To prevent the bad effects of Peter's rashness, Jesus immediately exerted his miraculous power, and healed the wounded person. He graciously interfered to allay the resentment of the armed company, and correct the mistake, which might have been fatal to his disciples. He enquired of his enemies, why they came against him with such a formidable force, as they had no reason to expect opposition, and why they had not seized him before, when he gave them the fairest opportunities. But, as he remarked, their malice, which had been restrained, was then let loose upon him, and the infernal spirits were permitted to employ their

utmost

utmoſt influence: yet their united efforts could prevail no farther than to fulfil the prophecies of ſcripture.

The ſight of Jeſus, as a priſoner in the hands of the wicked, was more than any of the Apoſtles could bear. They were ſtaggered, as if they had been deluded, and terrified, as being left defenceleſs. Forgetful, therefore, of their late proteſtations, they all forſook him, and conſulted only how they might ſecure themſelves by flight. Oh! the baſe ingratitude and treachery of their conduct! This defection muſt have been more painful to Jeſus, than all the violence of his oppoſers. It furniſhes, however, ſome uſeful leſſons: it teaches us, not to glory in men, not to depend on the firmneſs of the moſt eminent characters, nor to confide in any wiſdom, ſtrength, or goodneſs of our own, as ſufficient to preſerve us in the hour of temptation. May God of his mercy keep us from falling; or elſe "the fiery trial," which may poſſibly come upon us, will prove our weakneſs in a ſtill more awful manner! They neglected to improve the ſeaſon of retirement allowed them; and from the ſame cauſes, indulgence of ſloth, and omiſſion of watchfulneſs and prayer, many have forſaken and diſhonoured Chriſt. How forcible an argument for attention to duty!

But, turning our eyes to Jeſus, we behold an inexpreſſible majeſty and meekneſs in his deportment. The ſplendour of his divinity broke forth, even in this low ſtate of meanneſs and abaſement. His power and grace were both wonderfully exhibited; and, in the union of the two, the ſecurity of our ſalvation conſiſts. The Redeemer ſtood alone, being deſerted of all his ad-

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herents, even those who had seemed most faithful, and who had vowed that they would die with him. Yet he expressed no resentment; nor did he, in any measure, depart from his purpose. He went through his work "in the greatness of his strength," actuated by an ardent desire to accomplish the will of God, and make reconciliation for his people, whatever he might endure. O look unto Jesus, and consider, for what ends this amazing transaction was designed! Do you not feel a cordial regard to him for his voluntary submission to so much contempt and suffering? Does it not confirm your hope, and inspire you with an expectation of pardon, peace, and heaven?

Jesus was hurried away, as a criminal, from Gethsemane to Jerusalem, and there dragged from one part of the city to another. He was taken first to the house of Annas, and then to the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest, where, it should seem, though in the dead of night, the principal members of the Sanhedrim were assembled, waiting to receive their prisoner*. Here he underwent an examination before his malicious and enraged enemies. They questioned him concerning his followers and doctrine. He meekly replied, that he had said nothing in a covert manner, and appealed to those, who had heard his instructions, as the proper witnesses to be interrogated on the subject. For this gentle answer he received a blow, accompanied with marks of disdain, from an officer, who stood near

* Matt. xxvi. 57, &c. Mark xiv. 53, &c. Luke xxii. 54, &c. John xviii. 13—27.

him.

him. It is no ſlight provocation for an innocent perſon, when unjuſtly apprehended and brought to trial, to meet with indignities from the guard, who attends him, or the inferior miniſters of juſtice. Jeſus, however, with aſtoniſhing patience, ſought no vindication, but deſired only to know, whether what he had ſpoken deſerved ſuch treatment.

The holy Jeſus was arraigned: but what accuſation was brought againſt him? Pains were taken to furniſh, if poſſible, the leaſt ſhadow of a charge, on which his condemnation might be grounded. Rewards were offered to any who would perjure themſelves, and deliver ſuch a teſtimony, as might afford his judges a plauſible pretext for putting him to death; a meaſure, on which they had determined. But perſons of that deſcription, and whoſe aid ſeemed neceſſary, could not readily be found. So ſtrong a reſtraint does God impoſe upon the minds even of the diſſolute and abandoned, that they are afraid to affirm, what their inclinations would dictate. Were not this the caſe, there would be but poor ſecurity in ſociety either for property or life: and the righteous eſpecially would be ſo attacked by the lying tongue, that they could no longer maintain their place in the world.

At length two witneſſes aroſe, who gave in ſome incoherent accounts and groſs miſrepreſentations of what Jeſus had ſaid above three years before, concerning the deſtruction and rebuilding of the temple*. Weak and abſurd as the charge was, his enemies endeavoured to

* John ii. 19.

make it of consequence. On this ground they determined to try their prisoner, and accordingly, at the approach of day, they removed him to the grand chamber of the Sanhedrim, where they sat in full council, and put him upon his defence. He, however, replied not to the accusation. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth *." They were surprised at his silence; but he still refused to enter on his vindication, knowing that it could answer no purpose before those, who had resolved to destroy him.

The high priest then required him, by the most solemn form of adjuration, to declare upon oath, whether he was indeed the promised Messiah. Immediately he replied in the most explicit terms, that he was, and maintained, that, notwithstanding his mean appearance and their contempt of him, they should one day behold him in a state of the highest exaltation and glory, descending from heaven with divine majesty, as the supreme and universal Judge. This bold and open avowal of his character incensed them the more. They considered him as guilty of the most shocking impiety, in claiming so high a dignity, and agreed that he ought to suffer death as a blasphemer.

Did no one, then, arise to plead his cause, and wipe off the aspersion? No: the opportunity, generally allowed to criminals, of producing any favourable

* Isa. liii. 7.

testimonies, was denied to Jesus; a circumstance, which had itself been predicted*. Two of the Sanhedrim dissented from the rest; but it does not appear, that they stood forth in his defence †. His own disciples had deserted him. Peter and John, indeed, seemed to have recovered themselves from their flight, but they followed him only at a distance, and dared not to speak in his defence. Nay, Peter, with profane imprecations, denied that he had ever known him.

The trial being ended, fresh insults were offered to Jesus. He was treated by the lowest of the servants with insolent and cruel indignities, mocked, spit upon, buffeted, blindfolded, and beaten on the face; and at the same time the most vile blasphemies were uttered in derision and contempt. In various instances he fulfilled the prophetical description: He was "a reproach of men, and despised of the people;"—"he hid not his face from shame and spitting ‡." How wonderful were his condescension and meekness, how detestable the injustice and malevolence of his persecutors!

* Isa. liii. 8. "By an oppressive judgment he was taken off;
"And his manner of life who would declare?"

Bp. Lowth on this passage observes, that no one was punished for a capital crime, till proclamation had been made before the prisoner, allowing those, who knew him, to give evidence in his favour. But in the trial and condemnation of Jesus the usual rule was not observed: no proclamation was made for any person to bear witness to his innocence, nor did any one voluntarily step forth to give such an attestation.

† Luke xxiii. 50, 51. John xix. 38, 39.

‡ Psal. xxii. 6. Isa. l. 6.

What is the treatment, which the Saviour receives from us? It is generally allowed, that the conduct of the Jews was wrong; but is our's defensible? It is possible, that we may inveigh loudly and bitterly against their iniquitous proceedings, and yet be actuated by similar dispositions. This, at least, we know; neglect and hatred of Christ prevail among ourselves. "He is despised and rejected of men*." There are those who turn away from him with disdain, and refuse to hear his character and truth vindicated. There are those, likewise, who seek for objections, and vent their rage in profane and blasphemous speeches against him. All such we warn and exhort. O consider, whom you scorn and oppose! It is no other, than "the Christ, the Son of the blessed God." And will you take part with his enemies? What, then, can you expect the consequence to be? He does not, indeed, instantly confound you, but for the present allows you to triumph, and shew what is in your hearts. Yet "hereafter you shall see him sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven." You must stand at his bar, answer for your insolent contempt of his Gospel, and receive your final sentence from his mouth. O turn to him now, while he waits to be gracious, that you may have confidence and joy before him, at the great day of his appearing! Amen.

* Isa, liii. 3.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 40.

Jesus was examined before Pontius Pilate and Herod, scourged, derided, condemned, and crucified.

We are now called to behold the most stupendous and distressful sight ever exhibited: the highest greatness in the lowest state of abasement; perfect innocence overwhelmed with extreme suffering; the most transcendent excellence treated with general contempt and abhorrence. It is Jesus, "the Lord of glory," who was crucified for us men and for our salvation. "The holy One of God" submitted to be ranked with infamous malefactors, to endure excruciating tortures, and to be cut off by a violent death, as unworthy to live. This is a sight, which Angels, probably, viewed with astonishment. To Satan the transaction might seem to furnish matter of exultation for the moment; but it will certainly turn to his entire and everlasting confusion. With what affections shall WE regard it? A serious contemplation of the subject will excite in us emotions of godly sorrow and genuine repentance, and inflame our hearts with holy love and zeal. It is not a tragical fiction, designed merely to move the passions,

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but an awful reality, which is of unſpeakably greater importance, than any other occurrence in the hiſtory of mankind. We ſhall relate the facts ſimply as they are recorded, deducing only thoſe practical reflections, which naturally offer themſelves to our conſideration.

Jeſus, we have ſeen, had been already tried and condemned by the high prieſt and the grand council of the Sanhedrim. We might have expected, therefore, that they would proceed to ſtone him, according to their law, and as they had frequently attempted to do in the violence of their rage. But how then would the ſcriptures have been fulfilled? They foretold, that the Meſſiah ſhould ſuffer a particular kind of death, different from that which the Jewiſh ſtatutes appointed, a death of peculiar ignominy and exceſſive torture. And it is worthy of remark, that, as the Jews were at this time in ſubjection to a foreign yoke, and the privilege of inflicting capital puniſhments was veſted in their conquerors, ſo the code of the Roman power had annexed to the crimes of the baſeſt of mankind the pains of cruciſixion. The ſlave alone was condemned to be ſuſpended on the croſs: and to this was the Saviour reſerved.

Good Friday, Or the day of our Lord's crucifixion.

Accordingly, in the morning, after all the Sanhedrim had conſulted together, by what means they might moſt effectually accompliſh their wiſhes in the deſtruction of Jeſus, they commanded him again to be bound, conducted him to the judgment-hall of Pontius Pilate, the governor, or vicegerent of the Roman Emperor, and

there

there requeſted the immediate trial of the priſoner *. The Jews themſelves, however, under the pretence of a religious ſcruple, refuſed to enter the hall, leſt they ſhould contract ceremonial uncleanneſs from a place, which belonged to the Gentiles, and be unfitted for a participation of the ſacrifices, offered at the paſſover. Nothing could more ſtrongly mark their hypocriſy. At the very time they were filled with malignant rage, and intent on ſhedding innocent blood, they were unwilling to omit the outward forms of devotion, and dreaded a ritual defilement. To what purpoſe, we aſk, are men exact in external obſervances, while the vileſt affections maintain an aſcendancy in their hearts? Is the Lord God, who trieth the reins, thus to be impoſed on by an empty ſhew, or the mere profeſſions of regard to his ſervice?

Pilate condeſcended to comply with their ſcruples, and inſtituted his examination of the priſoner in the open air. He enquired, therefore, what charge they urged againſt him: they replied, that he had been convicted before them, as a notorious malefactor. But, not chooſing to proceed upon ſo general a declaration, or ſolicitous to be rid of the diſagreeable buſineſs, he deſired them to take the matter into their own hands, and manage the proſecution according to their law. They pleaded, however, that they could not inflict a capital puniſhment, without his expreſs warrant. They ſaid, " It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" confeſſing on this occaſion with readineſs,

* Matt. xxvii. 1, 2, 11—23. Mark xv. 1—14. Luke xxiii. 1—23. John xviii. 28, &c.

what

what they were generally unwilling to do, their subjection to the Roman power. But all these circumstances were so ordered, that the scriptures might have their completion, by the particular mode in which Jesus suffered. The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, and renders all events subservient to his own purposes.

To incense the Romans against the prisoner, the Jews alleged, that he had been guilty of seditious practices, having opposed the payment of the Emperor's tribute, and claimed regal honours to himself. Many other charges they preferred, endeavouring to traduce his character by the basest insinuations. To all these he made no reply, being content to bear reproach for our sakes: and his patient silence struck even Pilate with astonishment.

The governor then returned into the hall, and examined him more privately respecting those treasonable designs, of which he was accused. Jesus argued, that the peaceable deportment of himself and his followers sufficiently proved, that he aimed not at temporal dominion: yet he maintained, that he came into the world on purpose to establish another sort of kingdom, and concluded with a solemn admonition to his judge, to attend to the important truth, which he then witnessed before him. Pilate, probably being affected with this declaration, put the question, "What is truth?" but he waited not, perhaps wished not, for an answer. Ah! how many begin, but soon give up, the momentous enquiry, being drawn aside to some

other

other object, before they obtain any satisfactory information.

Pilate, however, being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, went out again, and bore an honourable testimony in his favour before his accusers, asserting, that he had found no fault in him. But this very attestation enraged them the more; and immediately, with still greater vehemence, they charged him as the author of tumult and sedition throughout the country, from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the mention of Galilee, it appeared, that the prisoner properly belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod, the tetrarch of that district, who was then at Jerusalem: accordingly, Pilate referred the matter to his decision, desirous to gain his favour, and to relieve himself from trouble.

Herod was the man, who had beheaded the Baptist. He rejoiced to see Jesus, probably from the motive of mere curiosity, as he had heard so much of this famous worker of miracles. Here, also, Jesus underwent a trial; but to the many questions, which the king proposed, he made no reply. The Jewish doctors, in their great zeal, followed him, and urged their malicious accusations: yet no proofs of guilt were produced. Herod and his soldiers treated him with the utmost scorn, as a poor contemptible creature, unworthy of any notice: having clothed him with some splendid vestment, in derision of his pretensions to royalty, he sent him back again to Pilate.

Was the matter, then, determined? No: further insults and cruelties were still in reserve. Had the Roman governor been upright, he would instantly have dismissed

dismissed the prisoner. He was convinced of his innocence, and the more so from Herod's examination. Having, therefore, again summoned his opponents, he declared his belief, that their charges were groundless, and proposed to release him, though not without scourging. Probably, he thought that a slight kind of punishment would pacify their minds, and that something must be conceded to their rage. Through the whole of his conduct you observe the character of a mean, time-serving man, resisting and at last stifling the dictates of his conscience, merely to conciliate the Jews, whom he had incensed by his former austerities. If, as he declared, he found no fault in the person accused, why did he not firmly maintain his cause against his malevolent persecutors? And especially, why did he offer to chastise an innocent man? It was a decisive proof of his want of integrity that he had not courage to act agreeably to his own convictions.

At the passover, the people were usually gratified by the Roman governor with the discharge of some one prisoner, whom they desired. Pilate, therefore, requested, that Jesus might be set at liberty on that occasion. But Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, was preferred before the Saviour and the Prince of life. Three times together the whole body of the populace, urged on by their rulers, with great vehemence opposed his release, and cried out, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." To these tumultuous clamours, after some faint resistance, the weak, the unrighteous judge submitted, probably considering it as a matter of necessity, that their

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rage muſt be appeaſed, even by the ſacrifice of the guiltleſs.

Yet ſentence was not immediately pronounced. Pilate ſtill endeavoured to ſave the life of Jeſus, and, it is ſuppoſed, with that view proceeded to ſcourge him, hoping that his enemies would then be ſatisfied, and no further acts of violence called for*. This, of itſelf, was a vile indignity; but more ignominious uſage and far greater cruelties ſucceeded. The Roman ſoldiers concluded that he was now delivered into their power, and began to treat him with inſolent contempt, as if he were an object for ſport. They derided his claims of majeſty, and clothed him with purple and ſcarlet; they crowned him with thorns, (which pierced into his temples and occaſioned extreme anguiſh) put a reed into his right hand, in reſemblance of a ſceptre, and then with bended knees paid their homage to him, as king of the Jews. Nor did their ſcornful abuſes ſtop here. With ſhameleſs wantonneſs and barbarity, they ſpit upon him, and ſmote him on the head, that his crown of thorns might give him more excruciating pain.

Even this did not ſuffice. Pilate brought him forth again before the people, bearing the marks of that contempt and cruelty, with which he had been treated, arrayed in mock majeſty, and having his face defiled and covered with blood. Probably, he ſuppoſed, that their compaſſion might at length be excited; and therefore having once more declared, that Jeſus had not been convicted of any guilt, he exclaimed, "Behold the

* Matt. xxvii. 24—31. Mark xv. 15—20. Luke xxii. 24, 25. John xix. 1—16.

man." As if he had faid, "While you view the wretchednefs of the prifoner, upon whom no fault is proved, let your refentment be appeafed, and all further perfecution ceafe." But, to prevent lenient meafures, their very teachers and leaders cried out with the fame acrimonious fpirit as before, "Crucify him, crucify him." In vain did the judge continue to affert his innocence: they now varied their accufation, and infifted that he ought to die as a blafphemer, becaufe he had claimed divine perfections, in maintaining that he was the Son of God. This gave a frefh alarm to Pilate, who therefore withdrew from the multitude, and demanded of Jefus, what was his original. Our Lord, however, refufed to anfwer the enquiries of a man, who would not act according to his confcience. This filence the governor confidered as a contempt of his authority: but he was then reminded, that his boafted power to fave or to deftroy was to be afcribed to a peculiar permiffion of Providence, and that he, though guilty, was lefs culpable than the promoters of the iniquitous perfecution.

Pilate, being now more than ever convinced of the prifoner's innocence, endeavoured to obtain his difcharge. But frefh and ftronger accufations were urged, and he himfelf was threatened, as being a traitor, an enemy to Cæfar, if he fhould acquit the perfon, who claimed regal honours. Intimidated by fuch a reprefentation, he placed himfelf on the feat of judgment, and prepared to pafs the folemn fentence. Yet, probably in derifion of thofe fears, which the Jews feemed to entertain for the eftablifhed government from fuch an opponent, he brought him forth again,

again, and cried, "Behold your king!" They rejected him, as before, with expreſſions of the utmoſt diſdain, and demanded his crucifixion.

What, then, remained to be done? Pilate found that all his endeavours to quiet the rage of the people were ineffectual; and, as he was determined to gratify them at any rate, he conſented to the death of Jeſus. But how ſhall his own conſcience be pacified? As a wretched expedient for the removal of his ſcruples, he waſhed his hands in the preſence of the multitude, declaring in a ſolemn manner, that they, and not he, muſt anſwer for the blood of this innocent perſon, whom they forced him to condemn. Unhappy Pilate! how much better would it have been for thee to have maintained a firm and inviolable regard to righteouſneſs and juſtice, and conſulted thy own convictions, rather than the clamours of a mob! What availed thy temporizing ſchemes! They betrayed the baſeneſs of thy character, increaſed thy guilt, and haſtened thy deſtruction *.

The caſe of the Jews was ſtill more deplorable. Determined to hazard every conſequence, if only their reſentment might be gratified by the death of Jeſus, they replied, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Thus they entailed the divine curſe upon themſelves and their poſterity, for the murder of the Son of God. And we know, that the vengeance of heaven has fallen in a remarkable manner upon that

* Pilate was ſoon afterwards depoſed from his government, through the accuſations of the Jews, whom he had ſo ſtudied to pleaſe: and it is ſaid, that he periſhed miſerably, by his own hands.

miſerable people, and continues to purſue them to this day, for the part they took in that horrid tranſaction.

At length the unrighteous judge pronounced the awful ſentence, that the holy Jeſus, whom he had repeatedly declared to be a blameleſs character, ſhould be delivered to the will of the enraged multitude, to expire under the very ſevere tortures of crucifixion.

Here let us pauſe, that we may indulge our ſerious meditations on the whole of this amazing tranſaction. "Conſider Him, that endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf*." Recollect the high dignity of the ſufferer, and the cauſe of his voluntary humiliation; and then every circumſtance, here related, will excite your devout aſtoniſhment. While you view with terror the obſtinate and malignant rage of his enemies, you will admire and praiſe the condeſcenſions of his love. Fix your regard upon him in this ſtate of deep abaſement. "Behold the man!" He is indeed "a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief†;" yet he is no other than "the man, who is the fellow of the Lord of hoſts ‡." He ſubmitted to be an object of ſport and deriſion to thoſe, who were the creatures of his hands. He endured the vileſt indignities from them, when he might have conſigned them to deſtruction. He ſtood with ſilence and forbearance before his accuſers, and reſiſted not the violence of ſuch as buffeted and ſcourged him. We are ready to wonder, that he did not ſtrike dumb the tongue of the ſlanderer and buſy mocker, and that he did not unnerve the injurious arm, that was lifted up againſt

* Heb. xii. 3. † Iſa. liii. 3. ‡ Zech. xiii. 7.

him.

him. But we learn from him "to take it patiently," whenever "for conſcience toward God we endure grief, ſuffering wrongfully;" "becauſe Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us an example, that we ſhould follow his ſteps: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he ſuffered, he threatened not, but committed himſelf to Him, that judgeth righteouſly *."

In all theſe various circumſtances, likewiſe, we mark the exact completion of ancient prophecies. Thus Meſſiah ſpeaks, "The mouth of the wicked, and the mouth of the deceitful are opened againſt me: they have ſpoken againſt me with a lying tongue. They compaſſed me about alſo with words of hatred; and fought againſt me without a cauſe †." "But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man, that openeth not his mouth ‡." "I gave my back to the ſmiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from ſhame and ſpitting §." We are, therefore, to regard the divine purpoſe in theſe minute events. The Jews and Romans, while they were left to the influence of their own paſſions, became the inſtruments of accompliſhing the ſcriptures and the decrees of God. Thus the Apoſtles interpreted the matter, when they ſaid, "Of a truth againſt thy holy child Jeſus, whom thou haſt anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Iſrael, were gathered together, for to do whatſoever thy hand and thy counſel determined before to be done ||." Such a view of

* 1 Pet. ii. 19—23. † Pſal. cix. 2, 3. ‡ Pſal. xxxviii. 13.
§ Iſa. l. 6. || Acts iv. 27, 28.

the government of God, as overruling even the vileſt deſigns of his enemies for his own glory, may tend to give us compoſure, confidence, and joy, under the darkeſt diſpenſations.

The promoters of this malicious proſecution carried their point, and triumphed in the victory. The very ſentence was paſſed, which they had ſo eagerly deſired: and immediately, after ſome freſh inſults offered to the priſoner, they proceeded to the execution *. A croſs, the inſtrument of torture and death, was prepared, and, part of the cumbrous load being laid upon him, he was compelled to bear it, ſo long as his fainting body could ſupport the burden. Thus oppreſſed, he was led forth through the ſtreets of the city towards Golgotha, that, according to the typical repreſentations of the Jewiſh ſacrifices, he might "ſuffer without the gate †."

What an awful proceſſion was this! Jeſus, the Son of God and the Saviour of men, whoſe whole life had been ſpent in works of mercy, conducted, amidſt the general execrations of the people, as an atrocious criminal, "appointed to die!" Did not his oppoſers relent at the ſight of his miſery? The moſt notorious offenders in our country, when cut off from ſociety by the ſentence of the law, are pitied and prayed for by the ſurrounding multitudes. There are few ſpectators, on ſuch an occaſion, whoſe cheeks are not bedewed with tears of compaſſion. But Jeſus was treated with inſult and diſdain, even in this laſt tremendous ſcene.

* Mat. xxvii. 31—35. Mar. xv. 20—24. Luke xxiii. 26—33. John xix. 16—18. † Heb. xiii. 11, 12.

At

At length he was relieved from the preſſure of his burden, probably becauſe he fainted. His attendants, not from kindneſs, but to preſerve his life for public execution, compelled Simon a Cyrenean, whom they met by the way, and perhaps ſuſpected of being a diſciple, to bear the croſs in his ſtead.

Immenſe crowds of people joined the proceſſion, and among the reſt were ſome females, who, being deeply affected by the view of his ſufferings, dared to expreſs their tender commiſeration. To them the loving Saviour looked with kind regard, and, declaring his own readineſs to endure the utmoſt extremity, exhorted them to reſerve their tears for other purpoſes, and bewail the miſeries, which were then about to fall upon themſelves, their families, and their devoted country. He predicted, that ſuch would be the general deſolation of the land, and ſuch the diſtreſſes of mothers for their children, that barrenneſs would be accounted a peculiar happineſs, and that his exulting enemies would ſhortly be ſo oppreſſed by terror and deſpair, as to long for an immediate diſſolution, even by the moſt violent means. He added, that, conſidering the difference of their character from his, they could not look for the ſupports, which he experienced, and that they were as dry fuel prepared for the burning. How ſolemn the admonition! And how needful is it ſtill to weep for the multitudes, who remain in avowed oppoſition to Chriſt! Miſeries, inconceivably more dreadful than any temporal calamities, are coming upon them; ſo that, in the horror of their ſouls, they will wiſh for utter annihilation, and ſay to the mountains

and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who ſhall be able to ſtand *?"

Having arrived at the appointed place, they offered him a cup to drink, not to alleviate but increaſe his diſtreſs. It was a bitter potion; and he refuſed it. Some have ſuppoſed that a different draught of a pleaſant and generous cordial was prepared by his friends; and that, as he did not wiſh for any mitigation of his pain, he would not avail himſelf of their kindneſs.

The execution immediately followed. His hands being ſtretched out upon the tranſverſe beam, and his feet fixed to the upright part of the croſs, thoſe tender and ſenſible members of the body were pierced through and nailed to the wood. The croſs was then erected and faſtened in the ground; and the holy ſufferer remained ſuſpended in extreme anguiſh. Such was the ſituation of Jeſus, when he "made his ſoul an offering for ſin."

And here, while we pauſe, that we may indulge our devout meditations, the enquiry almoſt forces itſelf upon us, Why was all this permitted? We are loſt in wonder: yet, myſterious as the plan may be, God fulfilled his own purpoſes in the whole of this ſingular tranſaction. Thus it had been determined in the counſels of infinite wiſdom; and therefore "thus it behoved Chriſt to ſuffer." The ſcriptures of the old teſtament had predicted the grand event with all its

* Rev. vi. 16, 17.

various

various circumstances: and it could not be otherwise, but that every type and prophecy must have its full accomplishment.

It seemed unlikely, that Jesus should die by crucifixion, because this was a Roman not a Jewish punishment; and it might have been expected, from the fury of the people, that they would have dispatched him suddenly, without waiting for a formal trial or judicial process. But, amidst all the commotions which may arise from human machinations, "the Lord reigneth," and "the wrath of man shall praise him *." While the enemies of Jesus followed their own devices, their passions were over-ruled, in order that the great Antitype might answer to all the ancient figures, by the manner of his death.

Isaac was directed to be offered as an oblation to God, and himself carried the wood, which was designed to consume his body: and thus he represented the Redeemer, the appointed victim for the expiation of our guilt, bearing his cross to Calvary. By the paschal lamb intimation had been given to the Church for many preceding ages, that "the Lamb of God" should be slain to take away the sins of the world, and yet be so remarkably preserved by the divine providence, even in his extreme sufferings, that not a bone should be broken †. The cross of Christ, as the means of our deliverance, was still more clearly exhibited by the brasen serpent, lifted up on a pole for the cure of the wounded

* Psal. lxxvi. 10. † Exod. xii. 46. John xix. 36.

Iſraelites in the wilderneſs *. From the hiſtory before us it appears, that each of theſe ſigns has received an exact completion.

Some expreſs predictions, alſo, rendered this particular kind of death expedient and neceſſary. Thus the Meſſiah ſpeaks by David, " They pierced my hands and my feet †;" and by Zechariah, " They ſhall look upon me whom they have pierced ‡." The PIERCING of the body, eſpecially in the parts here ſpecified, evidently denoted crucifixion. Now, ſuppoſe for a moment, that Jeſus had ſuffered in any other way, theſe prophecies would have failed, and he himſelf been found an impoſtor and deceiver; for he had declared, that he ſhould be delivered to the Gentiles, to be mocked, and ſcourged, and CRUCIFIED §.

But, in contemplating this ſubject, let us not reſt in ſpeculation. If " before our eyes Jeſus Chriſt hath been evidently ſet forth, crucified among us," we ought to be filled with admiration of his grace, with gratitude, love, and zeal. To behold ſuch a ſight even with indifference, betrays a lamentable ſtupor of the mind, and an alienation of the ſoul from the life of God. A proper view of the Saviour " ſuffering for ſins, the juſt for the unjuſt," will command our attention, and inſpire us with all holy affections. If we underſtand the nature and value of the object here propoſed, the whole world, with all its boaſted enjoyments, will appear little in our eſti-

* John iii. 14, 15. † Pſal. xxii. 16. ‡ Zech. xii. 10. § Matt. xx. 19.

mation.

mation. We ſhall determine to know nothing, and glory in nothing, but Jeſus Chriſt, and him crucified *. We ſhall perceive ſin to be "exceeding ſinful," reſolve that "our old man" and all his corrupt members ſhall be mortified with Chriſt, and dread the thought of "crucifying the Son of God afreſh, and putting him to an open ſhame." The croſs, when apprehended by faith, will appear to contain a complete remedy for the neceſſities of our guilty ſouls; and while, through this expedient, we approach to God with confidence and joy, we ſhall burn with eager deſire, that the bleſſed myſtery may be proclaimed throughout the earth, and ſinners of every deſcription perſuaded "to confeſs the faith of Chriſt crucified †." We ſhall feel our obligations more forcibly than words can expreſs, and our conſtant enquiry will be, "What ſhall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits ‡?"

Has the ſubject produced in us ſuch effects as theſe? It is allowed, that even ſincere and eminent believers are ſhamefully defective in love to the Redeemer. But, we fear, there are thouſands among us, who have never been brought under the influence of this divine principle. "The preaching of the croſs" is to ſome "a ſtumbling block," and to others "fooliſhneſs §." Through ignorance, pride, and unbelief, they preſumptuouſly cavil at and deride it; but may WE thankfully and joyfully receive it, as bringing the higheſt glory to God, no leſs than complete

* 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal vi. 14. † Office of baptiſm. ‡ Pſal. cxvi. 12. § 1 Cor. i. 23.

ſalvation

ſalvation to man! May it be made effectual to ſubdue in us all haughtineſs of ſpirit, the love of ſin and of the world! May it eſtabliſh us in peace and confidence toward God, and give us the victory over death! Then, having gained an admiſſion into heaven, we ſhall ſing for ever, "Worthy is the Lamb, that was ſlain, and hath redeemed us to God by his own blood." Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 41.

Jesus, hanging on the cross, prayed for his murderers—was reviled—comforted the penitent thief—complained of desertion—expired—was pierced—taken down and buried.

THE glory of the Saviour broke forth at various times throughout his humiliation, to the astonishment of many beholders. Even at the last, his dignity, when most obscured, was illustriously displayed. There were certain circumstances, attending his deepest abasement, which in a peculiar manner command our reverence, and conciliate our esteem. While these are proposed to our serious contemplation, we shall look beyond the meanness of his appearance, and, perceiving the real excellency of his character, we shall be constrained to admire, love, and praise him.

We have already accompanied our Lord to Calvary, where his sacred body was stretched out with extreme anguish, pierced in its tenderest parts, fastened to the wood, and exhibited as a spectacle of infamy and contempt to all the people. We now return to

to the painful, though moſt inſtructive, ſight, and follow him in our meditations from the croſs to the grave. May we be made conformable to him in his ſufferings, and "our old man be crucified with him, that the body of ſin may be deſtroyed *!" As "by thy croſs and paſſion," ſo "by thy precious death and burial, Good Lord, deliver us †!"

If we advert to the circumſtances of his crucifixion, what do we behold in the conduct of his enemies, but inſatiable rage and cruelty? What do we ſee in him, but unexampled meekneſs, patience, and compaſſion? He offered no reſiſtance to their violence, but calmly reſigned himſelf, "as a lamb to the ſlaughter ‡." He was ſolicitous for the ſalvation of his murderers, rather than for his own perſonal eaſe and deliverance. While he commended them to the divine mercy, he manifeſted the riches of his grace. Even in his dying moments, "he made interceſſion for the tranſgreſſors §." He ſaid, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ‖."

What an eminent pattern is this! He not only taught, but practiſed, gentleneſs, forbearance, and love to the moſt malicious perſecutors: he poured out his heart in fervent ſupplication for them. He had frequently diſcovered the ſame diſpoſition on former occaſions: but no inſtance can be compared to this. After the vileſt indignities put upon him, at the very time when his blood-thirſty enemies were exerting the utmoſt efforts of their rage, and he was bleeding under their hands, he pitied their blind-

* Rom. vi. 6. † Litany. ‡ Iſa. liii. 7. § 12. ‖ Luke xxiii. 34.

neſs;

ness; for they understood not the sinfulness and danger of their conduct: he grieved for their miserable state, and prayed that they might not come into final condemnation. How few even attempt to imitate the bright example! It must, however, be allowed, that the proud, the implacable; and revengeful, who constitute a numerous company, bear no resemblance to Jesus.

Here the Redeemer has afforded us a representation of his gracious intercession in behalf of sinners: as Mediator between God and man, he is continually offering up a similar petition in heaven. There may be those, who shew the most decided and contemptuous opposition both to him and his people, for whom he pleads the merit of his blood as an adequate atonement, and may still be considered as speaking to the same effect, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The soldiers, who nailed him to the cross, having stripped him of his garments, divided them among themselves *; yet even in that division their minds were so overruled by a divine influence, that they fulfilled an express prophecy, and gave further evidence, that Jesus was indeed the Christ. For thus had Messiah spoken by David his progenitor, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture †." After this, they continued to watch him, that none might attempt a rescue.

Probably with the view of exposing him to ridicule,

* Matt. xxvii. 35—44. Mar xv. 24—32. Lu. xxiii. 34—43. John xix. 19—24. † Psal. xxii. 18.

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an inſcription, in the three languages generally uſed and underſtood, was fixed over his head, deriding his claims of majeſty: "This is Jeſus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief prieſts, indeed, were diſguſted, that they ſhould be repreſented as the ſubjects of ſo contemptible a king, and petitioned that the writing might be altered. But Pilate refuſed to comply with their wiſhes; and that very title, intended to reproach the Saviour, was ſo ordered under the divine direction, as to expreſs the honourable character and office, which he ſuſtains for the benefit of the true Iſrael.

Was not the rage of the people at length ſatiated? Were no tokens of compaſſion ſhewn to the holy ſufferer? No: quite the contrary. All ranks ſeemed to unite and vie with each other, while they inſulted him by the moſt ſcornful and opprobrious ſpeeches. The mob ſurrounded and reviled him. Even thoſe, who were paſſing on the road, ſtopped to amuſe themſelves with his miſery, ridiculed the abſurdity of his pretending to be the Son of God and to rebuild the temple, and with virulent abuſe called upon him to make good his claims by eſcaping out of the hands of juſtice. But ſhall we wonder at the fooliſh ſneers of a thoughtleſs multitude, when their ſuperiors ſet the example? In this caſe, perſons of authority and of the ſacred function led the way, and "were chief in the treſpaſs." They laid aſide their dignity, and mixed in the tumultuous crowd, that they might promote the general outcry againſt the Saviour, and deride his helpleſs ſituation. As it had

been alleged that he had ſaved ſo many others by miracles, they now, in a diſdainful manner, required him to ſave himſelf, and promiſed that they would believe him to be the Chriſt of God, if he would prove his divine power by coming down from the croſs.

How weak, as well as wicked, were theſe ſpeeches! To have reſcued himſelf, would have been inconſiſtent with the great deſign of his incarnation. We rejoice, that, in order to accompliſh ſalvation for others, he would not accept deliverance. It would have been eaſy for him by one ſingle exertion to have obtained his releaſe; nor would this have exceeded, in ſtrength of evidence, many of thoſe works which he had performed in their preſence. Had their preſumptuous demands been granted, ſuch were the pride and obſtinacy of their hearts, there had ſtill been no hope, that they would have acknowledged him in his proper character. Men are deceived, when they ſuppoſe, that ſome ſtriking appearance or interpoſition, as an additional proof of revelation, would remove their unbelief. They, who arrogantly reject what is offered, would not be convinced by any demonſtration whatever.

The ſoldiers, alſo, joined in the ſame blaſphemous reproaches, calling on the Redeemer to aſſert his pretended royalty by eſcaping out of their hands; which they fooliſhly thought impoſſible. Thus that prophetic declaration was remarkably accompliſhed; " All they that ſee me laugh me to ſcorn: they ſhoot out the lip, they ſhake the head, ſaying, He truſted on the Lord, that he would deliver him: let

him

him deliver him, feeing he delighted in him *." How aſtoniſhing, that, in their profane ſneers, they applied the very words, and in the exact ſenſe, which had been predicted!

Two atrocious malefactors were crucified with Jeſus: he was placed between them, that he might lie under the greater odium, being exhibited to the public view as a perſon of the ſame deſcription. But this circumſtance fulfilled the ſcripture, which ſaid, "He was numbered with the tranſgreſſors †." No reproaches, it ſhould ſeem, were caſt upon them; ſo that he was accounted the vileſt of the three. One, at leaſt, of the thieves themſelves joined in the general ridicule, and, while dying in his ſins, ſtrove to forget his own miſery, that he might inſult and deride the Saviour. A ſtate of more confirmed and obdurate wickedneſs is ſcarcely to be conceived.

But, though in this criminal we lament the extreme degeneracy of our nature, we are called to admire the ſovereignty, freeneſs, and efficacy of divine grace in the pardon and converſion of his fellow ſufferer. An aſtoniſhing, and, as it ſhould ſeem, a ſudden, change was produced in the man, who appeared equally depraved, and equally near to the brink of deſtruction. At the lateſt moment he obtained an aſſurance of his acceptance and ſalvation. Poſſibly, he had never felt real impreſſions of religion before that awful ſeaſon, or offered a ſincere prayer to God. It is certain, at leaſt, that he was expiring by the hand of juſtice for his iniquities, and could not plead any pre-

* Pſal. xxii. 7, 8. † Iſa. liii. 12.

vious

vious goodneſs of his own. But at this hour his heart was ſoftened and renewed: he repented, believed, and received the full forgiveneſs of his ſins. Thus one was taken, and another left. Who ſhall preſume to find fault? For who has any claim upon God; or who ſhall dare to ſay, that He may not extend his pardoning mercy to what objects, and in what circumſtances, He pleaſes?

Many attempts have been made to obſcure the glory of divine grace in the converſion of the dying thief; as if the example were of a dangerous tendency. But, if we attend to it with godly ſimplicity, we ſhall find it replete with inſtruction. It is a ſtriking exhibition of the character of the Saviour, and of the triumph of his croſs. It confirms and illuſtrates the peculiar doctrine of the Goſpel, that men are juſtified in the ſight of God, not by their own obedience, but freely through the redemption that is in Chriſt Jeſus. The caſe is recorded for the encouragement of thoſe, "who are ready to periſh," and ſtands as an inconteſtable proof, that none need deſpair of acceptance, who look unto Jeſus, even though life itſelf be drawing to a cloſe. If any will abuſe it, this muſt be to themſelves; and doubtleſs, by ſuch a conduct, they will aggravate their guilt and condemnation.

The penitence and faith of this malefactor were conſpicuous. The grace of God changed and ſanctified his heart, while the blood of Chriſt, then ſtreaming from the croſs, expiated all his guilt. He reproved his fellow criminal for his daring contempt

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of the Saviour, and warned him to consider his danger: he frankly confessed his own iniquity, and the justice of that sentence by which he suffered: he vindicated the character of Jesus, when there was none to plead his cause: he believed on him for pardon and salvation, in that lowest degree of abasement: he prayed to him as the Lord of life, who was about to take his seat on the throne of glory, and who had heaven itself at his disposal: he said, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." Good evidence, then, was given of this dying convert's sincerity; and, though his religion was of a sudden growth, it was solid and vigorous; and, had he been spared, doubtless the most excellent fruits would have been seen in his future obedience. Our gracious Lord listened to his cry, immediately testified his own favourable acceptance, and assured him, that he should be with him, that very day, in an exalted state of purity and happiness.

How rich and extensive is the mercy of our God in Christ! The case before us will furnish us with a strong argument against despair; but let it not be abused, for the purposes of vain confidence and presumption. Though one of these malefactors was, indeed, "a brand plucked out of the fire*," yet it should be remembered, that the other, who appeared equally within reach of salvation, perished for ever. O fear, lest, while Jesus comes nigh to you in the ministry of his word, and many experience its inestimable benefit, you yourselves should be destroyed in unbelief!

* Zech. iii. 2.

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The croſs was ſurrounded by an inſulting multitude: but there were, alſo, ſome friends, and certain pious women eſpecially, who ſtood near our Lord *. Theſe attracted his notice, in the midſt of his ſufferings, and as he remarked among them his dear mother, he now paid to her the laſt tribute of filial duty and affection. Not having worldly poſſeſſions to leave, he committed her to the care and protection of John, his beloved diſciple, who likewiſe attended him. How tender the addreſs to her, "Woman, behold thy ſon!" How honourable the charge to him, "Behold thy mother!"

Whilſt Jeſus remained on the croſs, in a ſtate of extreme torture, a miraculous darkneſs commenced, about mid-day, which continued for three hours, and extended over the whole land. Such an event muſt have produced a general conſternation; and it was deſcriptive of the inexpreſſible horror, which almoſt overwhelmed the Son of God. How aſtoniſhing, on that occaſion, the complaint of the holy ſufferer! The agony of his mind, it ſhould ſeem, exceeded the ſharpeſt pains, which he felt from the piercing of his body. The light of his Father's countenance being withdrawn, he loſt all inward conſolation, and was oppreſſed, even as in Gethſemane, with anguiſh and terror beyond conception. In conſequence of this, he uttered that loud and bitter cry, "My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me?" Yet, ſtrange as the exclamation was, we know it was expreſly predicted †.

* Matt. xxvii. 45, &c. Mar. xv. 33, &c. Lu. xxiii. 44, &c. John xix. 25, &c. † Pſal. xxii. 1.

It were absurd to ascribe this effect to any groundless apprehensions, weakness, or timidity of spirit, or to seek for any other cause, than the office, which Jesus then sustained as our High Priest, making atonement for our transgressions. We behold, therefore, the deep malignity of sin, in the desertion here spoken of, as well as in every other part of his passion. How great his distress was, we pretend not to calculate. Those, who lie down in absolute despair, or the miserable souls, who are shut up in a state of darkness and horror for ever, can best tell, what it is to be forsaken of God. But, since we are all exposed to the attacks of Satan, and may at any moment be filled with anguish and dismay, under a sense of the divine displeasure, it will be proper to pray, that the great God may not thus leave us, to be terrified and confounded, especially at the solemn season of our departure. How suitable is that petition in our burial service, "Spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee!"

Did not the expressions of our Lord's distress move the compassion of his enemies? No: they turned his lamentation into ridicule; as if, when he cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani," he had been calling for Elijah. It was, therefore, proposed with a contemptuous sneer, that he might wait for that prophet to deliver him. Such were the blindness and obduracy of their hearts!

One more prophecy remained to be fulfilled; and, with view to its completion, Jesus exclaimed, "I thirst."

thirst." Let us hear, what the Psalmist wrote of the distress and anguish of his Lord and Antitype, and mark the circumstantial prediction, in which he described a method of insult, and a practice of cruelty, unusual and unheard of. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd: and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink *." The Gospel narrative proves, that this was exactly fulfilled in the history of the Saviour. When he complained of the burning, feverish heat, with which he was parched through the excess of his anguish, no refreshing draught was offered him, to assuage his pain; but the nauseous potion, which had been foretold, was administered. He was denied the common succour, which is never refused to an enemy in distress: though racked with torture, he was treated with every species of insult.

We hasten to the close of his sufferings, and proceed to consider the manner, in which he expired. Death was not the necessary consequence of crucifixion. He might have come down from the cross, or even retained his life there. No strength or violence of his enemies could have prevailed against his own choice. "No man," said he, "taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again †." But it had been appointed and declared from the beginning, that Messiah should redeem the Church by the sacrifice of himself. The typical obla-

* Psal. xxii. 15. lxix. 21. † John x. 18.

tions as well as various prophecies had given intimations, that "without shedding of blood is no remission*." Jesus, therefore, assumed our nature for this end, that he might die, and "bear our sins in his own body on the tree †."

Anxiously attentive to the completion of the sacred oracles, in all things pertaining to himself, he would not be released from that state of anguish, till he knew that every tittle was fulfilled: and thus he has laid a sure foundation for our hope and comfort. This object being attained, he cried, as if exulting in the great work he had accomplished, "It is finished;"—"all the important purposes of my incarnation are now answered; the glory of God and the salvation of my people are secured; and here I close my sufferings."

His strength was not even then exhausted: his voice, in his last departing words, was as one in full tone and vigour. That he might teach us to leave the world, maintaining faith and joy in God, he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit;"—"I intrust it to thy care, in cheerful dependence on thy truth and love, and in confident expectation of its re-union with the body." Having thus spoken, he bowed his head, and surrendered the life, which he had the power of retaining. Such a power, indeed, we do not possess. Our breath will be taken from us; whereas he resigned up his. In the act of quitting his abode on earth, as well as during the whole of his continuance here, he yielded a pure and unconstrained obedience to God.

* Heb. ix. 22. † 1 Pet. ii. 24.

What a momentous event was this! Such as had never before occurred. The Lord God, therefore, that he might glorify his Son Jesus, rendered his departure memorable by a train of miracles, and, as it were, arrested the attention of a careless world. All nature appeared in consternation, when the Lord of nature died. The sun withdrew his light, and thus afforded an emblem that the grand luminary of mankind was removed. The veil of the temple, or the sacred curtain which separated the holy of holies, and forbad the access of common worshippers, was instantly torn asunder, intimating, that the Mosaic dispensation was abolished, that heaven itself was opened, and liberty obtained to approach into the immediate presence of God. The earth shook by a violent convulsion, and the massy rocks were cleft by a supernatural force: and were not these prodigies suited to excite an alarm, on account of the atrocious deed, which had been perpetrated? The neighbouring sepulchres, also, suddenly disclosed their gloomy mansions to the public view: from the graves, then opened, the bodies of many departed saints arose, after the resurrection of Jesus, and appeared in Jerusalem. In such a signal manner it was proclaimed, that our crucified Lord had vanquished death, and ransomed his people from the power of the grave.

Notwithstanding these surprising miracles, many remained thoughtless and obdurate. But there were others of the spectators, whose minds were deeply impressed with grief and terror. The Centurion, especially, who attended with his band of soldiers to guard

the execution, felt and acknowledged a strong conviction, that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Ah! why does not that conviction force itself upon us all? And why does not this astonishing narration produce in us better and more lasting effects?

The reality of the death of Christ, on which our hopes are grounded, was proved indisputably by his enemies. The Jews, from their pretended regard to the sabbath, which was then approaching, requested of Pilate, that the bodies hanging on the cross might be removed, and that their legs might be broken, for the purpose of dispatching them the sooner. But, Jesus having already expired, that act of violence was not committed upon him. Thus the divine wisdom had appointed, according to the typical representation of the paschal lamb, that a bone of him should not be broken*.

The important fact was further evinced by the brutal rage of one of the soldiers, who struck a spear into his side, and pierced him to the very heart. Had life remained, that wound must have been mortal; for immediately there issued out blood and water, which flowed from the vital parts. This circumstance, on which the Evangelist strongly insists, was not only a proof of the Saviour's death, but an emblem of the blessings, which we derive from that event. He "came by water and blood †;" the water denoting the purifying grace of his Spirit, and the blood the expiation of our guilt. The two must be united, "not water only,

* Exod. xii. 46.

† 1 John v. 6.

but water and blood;" and both are communicated from the crucified Redeemer. You, who perceive your defilement, behold with gratitude and joy the remedy provided. See that stream, which proceeds from the pierced side of Jesus, and pray that you may experience its full efficacy. It is "the fountain opened, for sin and for uncleanness *."

Jesus, then, is "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood †;" and by this expedient God determined to display his own righteous character, and vindicate the honour of his government. Now it appears, that he is "just," and yet "the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus ‡." The atonement, here exhibited, furnishes the awakened penitent with such a plea, as may encourage him to approach to God with confidence and joy §. At the same time it will subdue in his heart the love and power of sin, and teach him to live in all holy obedience ‖. The cross of Christ, therefore, produces the most blessed consequences, and constitutes the very essence of our religion. Whoever may oppose or deride, it must be continually held up to view; and those, who understand its worth and feel its efficacy, will always contemplate the object with wonder, love, and praise. To them it will ever appear, as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God ⁋." It will impress their minds with a sense of their high obligations, and excite them to active exertions in the service of God. They will say with the Apostle, "We

* Zech. xiii. 1. † Rom. iii. 25. ‡ 26.
§ Rom. v. 11. ‖ Col. i, 21, 22. ⁋ 1 Cor. i. 24.

 thus

thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them*."

The sequel of the history directs our attention to the lifeless body of our Redeemer. He had been delivered to the Romans to be crucified, and according to their custom, probably, would not have been interred. But how then would the scriptures have been fulfilled? For our Lord himself had predicted, that, by his sepulture "in the heart of the earth," he should exactly correspond to the type exhibited in Jonas †. The same thing, also, was implied in that declaration of Messiah by the royal Psalmist, "My flesh shall rest in hope ‡." Now, the Jews were the means of giving this additional evidence to the character of Jesus, by petitioning for his burial. Yet, in order to complete a particular prophecy, another difficulty was to be removed. For, if buried at all, why should he not lie with the two thieves, in the place appropriated to the interment of malefactors? This, it should seem, was designed. But Isaiah had foretold, that, though "his grave was appointed with the wicked, with the rich man should be his tomb §."

Here, then, we perceive and admire the sovereign providence of God, accomplishing his own purposes. A person of opulence, rank, and reputation, Joseph of Arimathea, was not afraid or ashamed to appear as an

* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. † Matt. xii. 40. ‡ Psal. xvi. 9.
§ Isa. liii. 9. Bp. Lowth's translation.

advocate

advocate for Jesus, in that state of greatest infamy; though he never before had the courage to avow the attachment which he felt. He requested of Pilate, that the body might be left to his care: which being granted, he took it down from the cross, and bound it up in clean linen. Nicodemus, also, of the same honourable situation in life, and of a similar disposition, having prepared spices and ointments for embalming the corpse, came and assisted in the pious work. These two, therefore, with all suitable respect and solemnity, committed Jesus to a tomb, which was Joseph's property, a perfectly new sepulchre, hewn out of the rock, and not far from the place of crucifixion. Thus "he, who was too poor to provide a sepulchre for himself, was honourably interred at the expense of the rich *." They, probably, understood not the importance of this action, to which they were led by a divine influence: but we should adore that wisdom, which overrules all events, and brings to pass the most unlikely things, for the completion of the scriptures.

The entrance into the cave, where Jesus lay, was secured by a large massy stone. The women, who attended him at the cross, followed him with weeping eyes to the grave, and took particular notice of the place and manner of his burial. All these circumstances occurred on the Friday. The next day was the sabbath, or the season of holy rest: but, even then, the adversaries of Jesus ceased not from their malicious

* Bp. Chandler's Defence of Christianity. See also Bp. Pearson on the Creed.

exertions,

exertions. Not yet convinced by the miracles they had seen, nor satisfied with what their rage had inflicted, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate, and, having reproached the Saviour as a base impostor, desired that the sepulchre might be properly secured. They alleged, that peculiar care was requisite till the third day, lest his disciples should steal the body, and assert that he had risen from the dead, according to his prediction. Their request was granted; and therefore, to prevent any such fraud as they suspected, they sealed up the door of the cave, and placed a guard upon the spot.

Who is not struck with the malignant tempers of these opposers of Christ, who pursued him with their virulent reproaches even to the grave! Alas! what vile affections mark and disgrace the degenerate nature of man! Their invidious precautions, however, tended to his glory and their confusion. For it appeared from their testimony, that Jesus had expressly foretold his own resurrection: and they took the most effectual method to prove indisputably, not only that he was dead and buried, but also "that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures *." Thus will the subtle devices and malicious efforts of our enemies concur to promote "the furtherance of the Gospel." The faithful servants of Christ have no reason to dread "what man can do against them."

While we accompany Jesus to the grave, let us reflect on our own approaching dissolution, and the gloomy habitation to which our breathless bodies will

* 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4.

be

be consigned. We must be committed to the ground; but how unlike to Jesus, who "saw no corruption!" We must turn, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust *." Yet, if believers, we may smile under this expectation. The burial of Jesus will reconcile us to our own, and teach us to think of it with delight. Do we not desire to be conformed to our exalted Head; and may we not conclude, that our flesh, also, shall "rest in hope?"

But this is an unpleasant and offensive subject to you, whose attention is fixed on present things and sensual enjoyments. Yet we entreat you to consider, what will become of those delicate bodies, which you adorn and pamper with so much care and expense. Think, where your pride and luxury must end, blooming and vigorous as you may now be. Pray, that, "by continually mortifying your corrupt affections, you may be buried with Christ †;" and then you may rejoice in confidence, that "though after your skin worms destroy this body, yet in your flesh you shall see God, whom you shall see for yourself, and your eyes shall behold, and not another ‡."

* Burial service. † Collect for Easter even.
‡ Job xix. 26, 27.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 42.

Jesus was not left in hell—that he rose on the third day, is proved by the testimony of Roman soldiers, of many who examined his sepulchre, and of Angels—by his own appearing, to Mary Magdalene, to the other Mary and Salome, to Peter, to two disciples, and to the Apostles assembled together.

THE enemies of Jesus appeared to triumph in his crucifixion, as if they had attained their utmost wishes, and effectually ruined the schemes of the deceiver. They had secured, as they thought, their prisoner in the grave, beyond the possibility of any rescue; and with him all the hopes and expectations of his followers seemed to be buried. How dark and distressing was that season to his disciples! Such a degree of ignorance and unbelief still remained in them, that they were left in a state of extreme dejection. They had been unwilling to admit the idea of a suffering Saviour, supposing, like the other Jews, that the Messiah would establish a temporal dominion, that he would never die, and, if betrayed, would immediately effect his own release. Probably, they had no conceptions, that he would rise again, either totally forgetting, or grossly misunder-

misunderstanding all his declarations on that subject. We may conclude, therefore, that their minds were filled with black desponding thoughts, as if they had been deluded. "They had conceived great expectations from the persuasion, that he was the Christ of God. But these were all vanished, their promised deliverer, their expected King, was dead and buried, and no one left to call Him from the grave, as he did Lazarus*." Perhaps, too, the prospect of future difficulties oppressed and terrified their minds. What could they look for, but the most violent opposition, since their rulers had now prevailed against their Master, to destroy him?

We turn our attention from the sorrowing disciples to their departed Lord. While his body remained as a lifeless corpse in the tomb, whither did his spirit retire? Or what are we to understand by that article of our creed, "He descended into hell?" The full consideration of this point would not consist with the nature and brevity of our plan. But we observe, that, as the declaration is clearly deduced from scriptural expressions, we need not scruple to use it, though different interpretations have been delivered by learned

* West on the resurrection, p. 102. The author thinks it incumbent upon him to acknowledge the satisfaction and assistance he has received from that ingenious and valuable publication, in which the different, and apparently contradictory, accounts of the Evangelists respecting the resurrection are perfectly reconciled, and so arranged as to confirm each other. The reader, therefore, is apprized, that the statement of facts, which is here given, in proof of that important event, has been chiefly taken from Mr. West.

and pious men. Thus the prophet David ſpeaks in the perſon of Meſſiah, foretelling his reſurrection, "Thou wilt not leave my ſoul in hell: neither wilt thou ſuffer thine Holy One to ſee corruption *." Nothing more, however, can be inferred from this paſſage, than, that the Saviour ſhould continue for a ſhort ſeaſon in a ſtate of death, his ſoul among other departed ſpirits in the inviſible world, which is called HADES or HELL, and his body in the grave; and that, under the divine ſuperintendence, the latter ſhould be revived and again animated by the former, before putrefaction could take place.

We proceed, then, to conſider his return to life; and we ſhould do it with moſt devout affections, ſince it is an article, which lies at the foundation of our faith and hope. Intimations of this event had been given to the Church of old, by various types and ceremonial repreſentations. It had, alſo, been declared by ſeveral prophets, particularly David and Iſaiah. Accordingly, the Apoſtles in their addreſſes to the Jews maintained, that Jeſus had exactly fulfilled their ſcriptures by his reſurrection from the dead. He himſelf, as we have noted, had frequently predicted it, and on this very circumſtance riſked all the credit of his miſſion. So that, if he be not riſen, he has not anſwered the proper character of the Meſſiah, and has falſified his own aſſertions: the Goſpel may be rejected as a fraud; "our faith is vain, and we are yet in our ſins †."

* Pſalm. xvi. 10. † 1 Cor. xv. 17.

It will be neceſſary to examine this matter with the greateſt attention: and we ſhould bleſs God, that he has not left us in a painful uncertainty, but afforded us ſuch clear and deciſive teſtimony, that we know not what could be required further. We maintain, that no event in ancient hiſtory is or can be confirmed by ſtronger atteſtations: if theſe be rejected, we muſt withhold our aſſent from every narration, and treat all the records of antiquity as idle tales or impoſitions. Infidels affect to be ſcrupulous, and cavil at the moſt unexceptionable evidence in ſupport of the Goſpel; but, on other points, they readily admit the groſſeſt abſurdities.

The fact, for which we contend, is, that Jeſus of Nazareth, who died and was buried, did return to life, re-animate the ſame body which had been ſuſpended on the croſs, come out of the ſepulchre on the morning of the third day from his crucifixion, and appear to many different perſons at different times. Let the matter undergo a fair diſcuſſion: only let us yield to the force of argument, and not reſiſt our convictions. If the poſition be proved, let it be allowed, that the Chriſtian builds his hope on a firm foundation, and may, without preſumption, rejoice in the aſſurance of a glorious immortality. A cloud of witneſſes may be produced, whoſe atteſtations ſhould be ſeparately conſidered.

I. We appeal to the Roman ſoldiers, who were placed as a guard over the ſepulchre. It ſeemed unlikely, that theſe men ſhould deliver an evidence favourable to the cauſe of the Goſpel. But this they

have done in the most decisive manner. Very early in the morning, just as it began to dawn, after a violent shaking of the earth, an Angel descended from heaven, and, rolling away the stone, broke open the tomb *. Thus an opportunity was afforded, not only for the departure of Jesus, (who could easily have forced his way through the rock) but also for the admission of others to examine and judge for themselves; especially as the sentinels were removed. These, notwithstanding their boasted courage, were unable to maintain their post. By the bright appearance of the Angel, whom they clearly saw, they were thrown into such consternation, that for some time they lay upon the ground, as persons dead. Being a little recovered from their terror, they fled with precipitate haste into the city, where they reported the matter.

Some of them carried the account to the chief priests, who could not but be amazed and confounded by such a testimony, and yet were determined not to be convinced. A council of the elders was summoned, and it was agreed to pay no serious regard to the story, though they could not contradict it, and to endeavour to prevent its probable effect upon the minds of others. They could not deny that the stone was rolled away, and the body gone; and they perceived that these facts must soon be publicly known. But they bribed the soldiers to conceal the vision of the Angel, and put into their mouths a strange, incoherent tale, as if the disciples of Jesus had opened the sepulchre and stolen him away, while the guards themselves were asleep.

* Matt. xxviii. 1—4, 11—15.

This, it ſhould ſeem, was the only defence ever pretended to be ſet up by thoſe, who denied the reſurrection: a proof of the weakneſs of their cauſe, which could want ſuch a ſupport. There is ſomething ſo extremely abſurd and incongruous upon the very face of this forged account, that it carries with it its own confutation. Not to mention the improbability, that Roman ſentinels ſhould fall aſleep upon their ſtation, which would have made them liable to death, and eſpecially that the whole company ſhould be thus overtaken together; who can believe, that the diſciples ſhould be able to remove the heavy ſtone, which alone cloſed up the grave, and that they ſhould alſo bear off the body, ſo ſilently as to give no diſturbance to thoſe, who were cloſe at hand? Or, who can credit the relation of thoſe, who had ſo groſsly violated their duty, or allow them to vouch a matter, of which, by their own confeſſion, they could not be witneſſes? We aſk further, why was not the charge brought home againſt the followers of Jeſus? When the Apoſtles, a few weeks afterwards, ſolemnly and confidently maintained before the rulers, that their Lord was riſen, and that they themſelves had ſeen him, why were they not confronted with this ſtory? The reaſon is obvious; it was not only deſtitute of evidence, but would eaſily have been confuted; and, therefore, they were commanded merely to hold their peace. Their opponents, we perceive, admitted that the body, which had been ſecured in the ſepulchre, was gone, and, by the miſerable ſhift made uſe of to evade conviction, they

have not disproved, but rather confirmed, the relation of the Evangelist, who has given us a consistent account of the fact. This is not the only instance, in which the enemies of the Gospel have confounded themselves, and strengthened the cause, which they endeavoured to subvert. How astonishing is the power and wisdom of our God, who can turn the counsels of infidels into foolishness, and get himself glory by their malicious resistance!

II. We produce the attestations of various witnesses, who carefully examined for themselves, and declared that Jesus had quitted the sepulchre. The coincidence of these several evidences adds much to their weight. Many pious women, chiefly those who followed their Lord from Galilee, and ministered to his support, had made preparations for anointing and embalming his body with spices. 'This last tribute of respect for him, whom they so affectionately loved, they intended to pay early in the morning of the first day of the week, or the third from his crucifixion. It was agreed, that they should meet about sun-rising at the grave, not knowing, probably, that any guard had been fixed there. It should seem, that they went in separate companies, saw different visions, and reported their observations to the Apostles at distinct times. This easy and natural supposition perfectly reconciles the Evangelists, whose accounts, when thus taken together, make up one consistent story.

Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and Salome, set out first, before the hour appointed, that they might

view the place, and consider what help might be necessary for rolling away the stone *. Just at that juncture, probably, the resurrection was effected. Upon their approach, therefore, they found that the stone was already removed. Immediately Mary Magdalene, suspecting that the body of her Lord had been carried off by enemies, left her companions, and returned to inform Peter and John, what she had seen, and what were her fears on the occasion. These two Apostles, surprised at the report, ran to the sepulchre with eager haste, that from their own personal inspection they might judge for themselves. They entered the cave, and perceived that their Master was not there: yet, as the burial clothes remained, carefully folded up and laid in separate places, it appeared that there had been no disorder or tumultuous hurry in his departure. From these circumstances, probably, John concluded, that Jesus was indeed revived; though none of the other Apostles, at that time, had any such conceptions.

The incidents, already mentioned, excited great wonder in the minds of all the disciples. When they saw that the body was gone, and could assign no reasons for its removal either by friends or enemies, the thought of its resurrection might, possibly, be suggested to them: yet this was an event, which they had not looked for, and which, even when direct evidence was offered, they were backward to admit. That

* Matt. xxviii. 1, Mark xvi. 1—4. Luke xxiv. 1—3. John xx. 1—10.

evidence we now proceed to ſtate. It pleaſed God, in condeſcenſion to their ignorance and unbelief, to afford them one proof upon another, and ſo to overrule their ſcruples and objections, as thereby to confirm the important fact with additional and clearer teſtimonies. The extreme difficulty, with which they yielded their aſſent, ſo as to render theſe teſtimonies neceſſary, ſhews that they were incapable of forging the account.

III. We maintain, that Jeſus aroſe from the dead, on the expreſs and repeated declarations of Angels. Theſe holy ſpirits had been employed on former occaſions, in miniſtering to our Lord, and aſſerting his high character. Doubtleſs, at the ſeaſon here referred to, they rejoiced and triumphed, and eſteemed it an honour to themſelves, to bear witneſs of his return to life. Several deſcriptions of their appearances for this purpoſe are given by the Evangeliſts; and ſuch as at firſt view may be thought contradictory. But let it only be allowed, which is a reaſonable ſuppoſition, that theſe heavenly meſſengers had a power of being viſible or not, at pleaſure, and were ſeen in different forms by different perſons; and the objection of inconſiſtency is removed.

An Angel, clothed with tranſcendent brightneſs, came down to vindicate the credit and dignity of the Saviour: this he did by breaking open his ſepulchre, and confounding the guards, who were ſet there to prevent his eſcape, and to prove him an impoſtor.

Two of the women, alſo, who had arrived firſt at the place, "the other Mary and Salome," whom

Mary

Mary Magdalene had left there, were favoured with a vision of the Angel, upon their entering into the cave. To disperse the terror, into which they were thrown, he declared expressly, that Jesus, whom they sought, was risen according to his own prediction, and invited them to examine the spot, where he had been interred *. He charged them likewise, to carry this information to his disciples, and especially to Peter, who, pained by the recollection of his fall, most needed consolation; and he assured them, that their Lord would meet them in Galilee, as he had promised a little before his death †. Impressed with awful reverence by what they had seen and heard, yet at the same time filled with exceeding joy, they hastened to communicate the glad tidings, as they had been directed.

Upon their departure, Mary Magdalene, who had returned to the sepulchre with Peter and John, remained at the outside in deep distress: but, while she lamented the loss of her dear Lord, she looked in, and perceived there two Angels in a glorious form, who sat as guards over the place, where Jesus had lain ‡. Mary soon afterwards retired, and then came Joanna and the rest of the women, who prepared the spices for anointing the body: and it is evident, that they then knew nothing of what had happened §. They were astonished, therefore, when they found that the sepulchre had been opened, and that their Lord was gone. Their doubts and perplexities, however, were

* Matt. xxviii. 5—8. Mark xvi. 5—8. † Mark xiv. 28.
‡ John xx. 11 13. § Luke xxiv. 1—11.

removed by the declarations of two heavenly spirits, who appeared to them in human form, and assured them, that Jesus had returned to life again, in completion of his own prophecies. This account was carried to the disciples, and probably reached them, before they had been informed of the other visions: yet such was their incredulity, that they could not entertain a thought of the resurrection, and at first considered the relations, as no other than the effect of fancy and illusion.

The evidence, here adduced, is strong and unquestionable. The persons described are credible witnesses of what they saw and heard: nor can their representations, with any consistency, be ascribed to imagination. The events, which took place, were such as they did not look for; and yet they were obliged by many concurrent circumstances to yield their assent. It can never be admitted, that both their eyes and their ears deceived them, or that so many should be imposed upon, in the very same manner, and at the same time.

These pious women, to whom the important information was first communicated, were abundantly recompensed for their zealous attachment to the Saviour. Innumerable instances confirm the promise of our gracious God to his faithful adherents, "Them, that honour me, I will honour *." May we be encouraged to be more bold and active in his service, and we shall obtain more clear and distinguished marks of his approbation!

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

The preceding accounts left some doubt and hesitation upon the minds of the Apostles. They had been told, that Angels had asserted the resurrection of their Lord; but no one had yet seen him: and therefore, though they ought to have been convinced, a more direct evidence of the fact was necessary to overcome their incredulity, and accordingly it was afforded them, in condescension to their weakness. This is not the only instance, in which human infirmity has been the cause of a blessing to mankind, and an establishment of the truth and honour of God. In the case before us, it produced a record, which shall to eternity remain, for the comfort of every believer, and for the confusion and condemnation of every infidel.

IV. We contend, that Jesus incontestably demonstrated the point in question, by shewing himself alive to various persons, who had previously known him, and to whom he gave ample testimony of the reality and identity of his body.

1. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, before he vouchsafed the same favour to any of his former acquaintance*. We admire this grace and condescension in conferring such an honour upon a woman, who had probably been of an infamous character. But she had much forgiven, and she loved much. While she remained in tears at the sepulchre, and declared to the Angels the cause of her distress; Jesus came and placed himself beside her. At the first glance, she took him for the gardener; but her mistake

* Mark xvi. 9—11. John xx. 14—18.

was

was immediately corrected, when ſhe heard him pronounce her name in the ſame tone of voice, and the ſame affectionate manner, which he had uſed in his former intercourſe. Convinced that it was her Lord, ſhe flew with ardour to embrace him. This, however, he told her, ſhe muſt decline for the preſent, and intimated that he would ſee her again, and give her abundant proofs of the reality of his reſurrection, before he finally quitted the earth. He charged her, therefore, to carry the account to his brethren without delay, and aſſure them in the kindeſt terms, that he ſtill acknowledged his relation to them, and that, being mindful of their intereſts and of his own expreſs declarations, he ſhould ſoon aſcend, by a corporeal tranſlation, to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God.

O how free and abundant is his grace! What tenderneſs of compaſſion does he ſhew even to his fallen people! His diſciples had deſerted him in his extremity; but, immediately on his return to life, he was anxious to inform them, that they were as dear to him as ever, that he would continue to own them as children of the ſame Father, and plead their cauſe in heaven. The meſſage was delivered; and yet their doubts were not diſperſed. Poſſibly they argued, that, as Mary Magdalene alone pretended to have ſeen him, and as ſhe had not at firſt recollected or been ſuffered to touch him, ſhe might be under a deluſion, or the viſion, if real, might be no more than his ſpirit. But ſcruples of this kind were ſoon removed, as we obſerve

2. He

2. He appeared, alſo, to the other Mary and Salome *. They were flying from the ſepulchre, being charged by the Angels with a commiſſion to the diſciples, when Jeſus met them on the road, and addreſſed them in words of ſtrong conſolation. He exhorted them to diſmiſs their fears, and, by ſuffering them to embrace his feet, gave them a full conviction of his reſurrection. By them, too, he ſent word to his brethren, that in Galilee, where they chiefly reſided, he would afford them a gracious interview. From this occurrence the evidence was conſiderably ſtrengthened. Yet the Apoſtles, being " ſlow of heart to believe," might aſk, " If the Lord be riſen indeed, why has he ſhewn himſelf only to the women, and not to any of us?" It is preſumptuous, we confeſs, to refuſe our aſſent to fair teſtimony, and demand additional proofs for the removal of our unreaſonable doubts. But the Lord condeſcended to prevent or obviate ſuch an objection.

3. He appeared to Peter. In the meſſage of the Angels to the diſciples, particular mention had been made of Peter; but, though he had twice viſited the ſepulchre, once after the firſt report of Mary Magdalene, and again after that of Joanna †, yet he had not ſeen either Jeſus or the Angels. At length, however, his Maſter favoured him with an interview, probably before any of the other Apoſtles. The circumſtances of that interview are not recorded, but the fact is expreſsly declared ‡; and it ſtands as an inſtance of

* Matt. xxviii. 9, 10. † Luke xxiv. 12. ‡ 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5.

his

his tenderness to backsliders. He will recover, and pardon, and comfort. Such was his conduct to Peter, whose fall had been attended with the greatest aggravations, and to whom, even before the rest, he hastened to declare his forgiveness and love.

Still it might be argued, that all the preceding manifestations of the risen Saviour had been an appeal to the senses, rather than the understanding. They had been bright and dazzling, sudden and of short continuance, leaving little or no time for cool reflection and a deliberate examination of the scriptures. That there might be no ground for such an objection,

4. He appeared, the same day, to two other disciples, as they were going to Emmaus, about seven or eight miles from Jerusalem*. These persons were discoursing together, with an evident dejection of mind, on the late astonishing events, which engrossed their thoughts, when the Lord himself drew near, and with great familiarity joined their conversation, though he concealed his real character. It was his gracious purpose at this time, not to excite their wonder by any splendid vision, but to convince them by cool and solid reasoning from the sacred oracles, that they ought to have expected his death and return to life, since these things had been expressly predicted. They were prevented, therefore, by a miraculous agency, from recollecting and discovering him, till he had discussed the important topic, by a particular explanation of the

* Luke xxiv. 13—35.

types

types and prophecies relating to it, and reproved them for their ignorance and unbelief. When they came to Emmaus, he went into the same house, through their earnest request, and sat down with them to table. At this repast, he blessed and distributed the bread, according to his former manner, perhaps with the solemnity of the sacramental supper; and immediately the dimness which had been cast over their eyes was removed, and they recognized the person of their beloved Master. But, the end of his appearance being answered, he instantly withdrew from their sight.

As they reviewed this singular occurrence, they wondered at their own stupidity, remarking that they might have known him from the extraordinary energy of his words and the effect produced in their minds. They said one to another, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" Their doubts were all removed; they felt a rational conviction of their Lord's resurrection, and perceived that every thing had happened in perfect consistence with God's declarations. That same evening they returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Apostles assembled together and exulting in the thought, that their Lord was risen indeed, and had shewn himself to Peter. The different accounts were then compared; and yet, decisive as these testimonies were, some, at least, in the company withheld their assent, or, perhaps, allowing the accounts, concluded that his spirit only had been seen, and that his body, if revived, was carried up to heaven.

heaven *. How gracious and condeſcending was the Saviour to theſe weak, doubting, and incredulous diſciples! To ſatisfy their ſcruples, and prove inconteſtably, that his re-animated body yet remained upon earth, he manifeſted himſelf again that very hour. We add, therefore,

5. He appeared to the Apoſtles, then aſſembled together †. He entered the room in a miraculous manner; we need not explain or enquire, by what particular method. He ſtood in the midſt, with expreſſions of love in his countenance, and addreſſed them with words of conſolation. Surpriſe and terror overpowered them; and ſtill it ſhould ſeem, they were unwilling to admit, that the viſion was any thing more than that of his ſpirit. But he, in tender compaſſion, diſperſed their fears, and baniſhed their ſuſpicions.

At length, then, the evidence was full and complete. Not the women only, but the Apoſtles themſelves, were witneſſes of the reſurrection of Jeſus. He was ſeen, not merely by one or two, but by many together. Nor did he ſuddenly withdraw, like an airy phantom; for he now gave them deciſive proofs of the reality and ſameneſs of his body. "Here," ſaid he, "behold my wounded hands, and feet, and ſide, which retain the marks of what I ſuffered on the croſs. It is Jeſus, your Lord and Maſter, who ſtands before you. Take full ſatisfaction, and by touching and embracing

* Mark xvi. 13.

† Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 36—43. John xx. 19—23.

me

me be convinced, that this is not a ſpectre, but a real, corporeal ſubſtance."

O what tranſports of joy muſt have filled their hearts! Surely they felt the moſt ardent affections of gratitude, love, and zeal. Yet perhaps, for a moment, the whole tranſaction might appear too wonderful to be true. He remained, however, in their preſence for ſome time, upbraiding them with their perverſe and obſtinate incredulity, and evincing by further arguments the certainty of his reſurrection. He condeſcended to eat, in their company, the very food which they themſelves offered him. Again he expreſſed his earneſt deſires for their happineſs, pronounced his benediction, and renewed their Apoſtolical commiſſion. While he breathed on them, he gave them aſſurances of large communications of the Spirit, and engaged to ratify their ſentence, when they ſhould declare, to whom remiſſion of ſins ſhould be extended, and from whom withheld.

Here we pauſe, and thus cloſe the evidence, exhibited on the day in which our Lord roſe from the dead. The ſubject requires a more full and particular application, than the preſent ſection will admit. Let us meditate upon it, for our own ſpiritual improvement. Theſe numerous atteſtations were intended for our conviction, as well as for that of the Apoſtles. Even the pertinacity of their unbelief has eventually proved a bleſſing, as confirming more abundantly the truth of the ſcriptures. We ſee, then, on how firm a baſis our faith and hope are built, and how guilty, how inexcuſable thoſe are, who reject

or

or despise the Gospel. The fact, which is here maintained, constitutes an essential article of our creed: the whole system of Christianity must stand or fall with it. But so decisive are these testimonies, that we may defy the most powerful and malevolent attacks of infidels; all their attempts to subvert the foundation of our religion will turn to their own confusion.

In the resurrection of Jesus we perceive a never-failing source of consolation. We rejoice in the sufficiency of that ransom, which he paid down, and in the complete victory which he has obtained for us over all our spiritual enemies. With peculiar exultation, therefore, we sing, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ *:" and, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead †." But does this song of triumph properly belong to us? What are the advantages which we have derived from the Saviour? By our own experience of his ability to save, can we stand forth as his witnesses, maintaining that "the Lord is risen indeed?"

Let us not forget, that he will appear again, in the very same body, which was crucified on mount Calvary, and came forth from the sepulchre on the third day. His faithful people shall then meet him "with joy unspeakable and full of glory:" he will raise them up by his mighty power, and admit them to a state of

* 1 Cor. xv. 57. † 1 Pet. i. 3.

delightful

delightful intercourse with himself for evermore. But how will those behold him, "who have crucified him afresh," and continued to pierce him by their contemptuous unbelief? He will be their Judge; and such will be his manifestation, as to overwhelm them with confusion, horror, and despair. May we obtain redemption through his blood, and "know the power of his resurrection," so that, "when He, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory*!" Amen.

* Col. iii. 4.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 43.

Jesus appeared at Jerusalem, for the conviction of Thomas—at the sea of Tiberias—on a mountain in Galilee—and again at Jerusalem, a little before his ascension.

NEVER was there an event of greater importance to mankind, than the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and never was any fact so well attested. One evidence was added to another, to prevent or remove every doubt. Jesus "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs *," till he had convinced the most unbelieving, and satisfied the most scrupulous, of his disciples. He appeared to them not merely once, but frequently, and gave them full liberty to examine, by such trials as they desired, whether he had risen with a real body, the very same which they had formerly known, and which they had beheld suspended on the cross. He came to them in different places, continued long in their company, did eat and drink with them, and delivered particular instructions and commandments, "being seen of them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

* Acts i. 3.

These

These visits of the Saviour to his Apostles were intended, not only to assure them of his high regard, and promote their particular comfort, but to qualify them for the important office of attesting his resurrection, and proclaiming his salvation to the various kingdoms of the world. Accordingly, in due time, they went forth and avowed themselves his witnesses, in the face of the most malignant and powerful opposers. They have given a clear, decided, and indubitable testimony of the fact, which we are considering; and their declarations ought to be seriously regarded. They could not be deceived by the united report of so many of their senses, for they heard, and saw, and handled their beloved Master; nor would they have concerted such a plan for deceiving mankind, when they had nothing to expect from it, but the most violent persecution even unto death itself.

We have already mentioned our Lord's appearances on the day of his resurrection, and shall now advert to those, which occurred from that time to his ascension. May our contemplations on this subject promote in us all holy affections! May we not merely assent to the doctrine proposed, but derive from it an increase of faith, hope, love, and joy!

I. He appeared with a particular view to the conviction of Thomas*. Evidence sufficient had been given to all the other Apostles; and accordingly they were satisfied. Indeed, they ought to have yielded their assent much sooner than they did; and therefore

* John xx. 24—29.

Jesus reprehended them for their unbelief. But when he first shewed himself to them, as they were assembled together, Thomas was not present, and, upon the report being carried to him, he refused to credit their testimony. He presumptuously required the conviction of his own senses, before he would allow the appearance to be the very body of his Lord. He declared, that he would see, and put his finger into, the print of the nails, which had been used in the crucifixion, and thrust his hand into the side, which had been pierced by the soldier's spear, or else, that he would reject all other evidence.

Thomas, it seems, remained in this state of darkness and unbelief for a whole week. During that time we do not find that Jesus visited any of his disciples: perhaps he designed, that in the interval they might be more at leisure for a deliberate examination of the scriptures, and the attestations already given. But on the eighth day following, or the next return of the first day of the week *, he came, in the same miraculous manner as before, into the midst of their assembly. Having declared an affectionate regard for them all, he condescended to address the incredulous Apostle, who was then present, and for his full satisfaction offered him the very proofs, which his presumption had demanded.

* It is likely, that the first day of the week, from that time, became the stated season of the solemn meetings in the Church, and was celebrated as the Christian sabbath, being distinguished by the high and honourable appellation of the Lord's Day. Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Rev. i. 10.

What

What further objection could remain? Thomas was ashamed and humbled: convinced by such undeniable evidence, he acknowledged not the resurrection only, but the Godhead of his Saviour, and worshipped him with profound reverence and adoration, crying out, "My Lord, and my God!" His former weakness was now pardoned, and his faith, though it rested on sensible demonstration, was graciously accepted. Jesus rebuked him, but with tenderness, for having so long refused his credit, and pronounced a peculiar blessing on those, who, with real humility of mind, yield an unfeigned assent and submission to the Gospel, even though such strong testimonies should be withheld, as a sceptical and arrogant caviller might require.

This occurrence should warn us to beware of unbelief, which may, probably, attack us in various degrees, and in different shapes. How many around us are perplexed with unreasonable doubts and scruples about the doctrines, and even the truth of revelation! Do you complain, that sufficient evidence is not afforded you? But do you not indulge a very blamable disposition, as Thomas did, whilst you are unwilling to admit that light, which might produce conviction? Have you fairly studied the subject, and diligently examined the proofs and arguments, in which others acquiesce? It is not for you to prescribe to God, by what particular means he ought to confirm his word. There is no need of further information, if only your hearts were right. "Be not faithless, but believing." You should not expect or

ask for such kind of demonstration, as Thomas received; but learn with him to bow with real subjection to the Saviour, acknowledging his essential glory, and his indubitable right to your love, reverence, and obedience, while you say from the heart, "My Lord, and my God."

II. He appeared at the sea of Tiberias*. The disciples, having remained the full time at Jerusalem for the celebration of the passover, returned to Galilee, where the chief part of them resided. Thither the Angels directed them to go, and there Jesus himself promised to meet them. It is probable, that his most frequent visits were made in that country, where his interviews with friends might be more convenient, and less likely to excite notice and resentment, than at Jerusalem. A minute account of these interviews is not given us; nor is it necessary, as they were designed, not for the proof of his resurrection, which was then sufficiently established, but for the private instruction and comfort of his dear followers. In every fresh conference he confirmed their faith, displayed his own power and grace, and manifested the most tender affection for them. This we cannot but remark, in the instance now before us.

Several of his disciples were engaged in fishing, which had once been their common occupation; and, probably, they were still obliged to have recourse to it for their support. When they had laboured a whole night in vain, Jesus presented himself to them on the

* John xxi. 1, &c.

sea

sea shore, and directed them where to cast their net. A miraculous draught immediately convinced them, that it was their Lord, who was at hand, and had given them such success. They hastened to him; and upon their arrival, having prepared a fire and provisions, he condescended to eat with them.

Perhaps, by that large capture he intended to afford them a seasonable relief for their necessities, and to encourage their dependence upon him, as the Lord of providence and grace. They were appointed to be fishers of men; and, though in their office they might seem for a long time to labour with no good effect, they were now taught, that, under his direction and influence, they might hope to inclose immense multitudes in the net of the Gospel. Blessed Jesus, compassionate the ignorance and weakness of thy ministers in our day! While they lament, that they weary themselves in vain, do thou graciously instruct them, where and how they should cast the net, so that many may be taken!

In discoursing with his disciples on that occasion, Jesus paid a particular regard to Peter, probably on account of his late fall, not only to reprove, but to restore and comfort him. After dinner, our Lord proposed a solemn enquiry to the Apostle, whether, as he had once professed, he loved him more than all his brethren did. Peter replied with great firmness, that he felt the most sincere affection for his Lord, and appealed to Him, as the searcher of hearts, for the truth of the declaration: but, remembering his own perfidious conduct, he dared not to boast, as he had done

before, that his attachment was ſtronger than that of others. Jeſus then required him to prove his regard, by faithfully performing the paſtoral office, feeding the lambs of his flock.' Thrice did he renew the queſtion, "Loveſt thou me," and thrice repeat the charge, "Feed my ſheep."

Let each one conſider himſelf as addreſſed by the Saviour in the ſame ſolemn manner, "Loveſt thou me?" What anſwer could we return? Some with humble confidence might maintain, even in his preſence, that their hearts glow with the warmeſt affection for him. But many, whoſe minds are attracted by different objects, notwithſtanding their profeſſion of ſerious deſires, can come to no ſatisfactory determination about the real ſtate of their ſouls, and therefore remain in a very painful ſuſpenſe. Others ſurely, if thus interrogated, muſt be confounded; ſince their habitual diſpoſitions and general practices declare an avowed diſregard, and even an inſolent contempt, of Jeſus. It will be ſoon decided, whether we have a real attachment to his name; and "if any man love not the Lord Jeſus Chriſt," a tremendous "anathema" reſts upon his head *.

Peter was then informed, that in his old age he ſhould be called to glorify God by ſuffering the ſame kind of death, as his divine Maſter had done, and he was immediately charged to follow Him. A vain and fooliſh curioſity tempted the Apoſtle to enquire, what ſhould become of John, the beloved diſciple, who, it

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

ſhould

ſhould ſeem, proceeded with ſilent meekneſs to attend his Lord. But curioſity is ſeldom gratified. In the preſent inſtance, it met with a reproof; for Jeſus replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

Poſſibly, we may wiſh to propoſe a thouſand queſtions more abſurd and impertinent than Peter's was. But let us learn to check our eagerneſs for information in matters, which do not concern us. Why are we ſo anxious about events, with which neither our happineſs nor duty is at all connected? One thing is of unſpeakable importance and abſolute neceſſity; nor ſhould any other ſubject occupy the mind to the neglect of this: it is, that we obey the Saviour's call, and go forth at his command. Are we willing to comply with the injunction, as the Apoſtles did, though contempt and poverty, impriſonment and death, await us? How many ſhrink at the appearance of danger! May the love of Chriſt conſtrain us; and under that influence, leaving all idle ſpeculations, and fearleſs of the ſevereſt calamities, we ſhall follow him cheerfully, counting nothing of any real value but his favour, his ſervice, and glory!

III. He appeared to a large body of his diſciples upon a mountain in Galilee *. It ſhould ſeem, that many, perhaps the moſt of thoſe, who profeſſed an affectionate regard to him in that country, met there by his appointment. Probably, he had fixed the time and place, that a great number might more conveniently come together. It is ſuppoſed, that Saint Paul

* Matt. xxviii. 16, 17.

refers

refers to that assembly, when he says, "He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once*;" and we learn that the chief part of these persons survived for several years, and attested the fact, of which they were eye-witnesses.

Upon a particular mountain, to which they had been directed, Jesus presented himself in the midst of them. Some had been disposed to doubt his resurrection; but they were then convinced. They saw, believed, and worshipped him. May we, also, confess his glory, and bow before him with humble adoration! It is as incumbent upon us to do it, as it was upon the disciples in Galilee; though we are not favoured with the same discoveries, which they had. Our faith is supported by unquestionable evidence. May the Saviour manifest himself to us by the power of his Spirit: and then we shall join our testimony with that of the ancient Church, and we shall say, "The Lord is risen indeed!"

Afterwards he appeared to James, but no particulars of that visit are recorded; and once again to all the Apostles, as we shall soon remark†. He did not shew himself alive in a more public manner, either to the whole body of the people, or to the chief priests and rulers‡. Such an exhibition was not necessary to prove the truth of his resurrection, which is established by the testimony of a sufficient number of indubitable witnesses. That peculiar favour could not be due to

* 1 Cor. xv. 6. † 1 Cor. xv. 7.

‡ Acts x. 41. See Bp. Atterbury's Sermon on this subject.

those,

those, who had rejected him with so much contempt and violence. Besides, if it had been granted, it was not likely to produce any good effect, since they refused to be convinced by all that he had said or done, and ascribed his miracles, illustrious as they were, to the power of magic or the agency of Satan. God is usually pleased to withhold an increase of spiritual means and privileges from them, who abuse or despise what they possess, and to bestow greater advantages upon such, as highly value, and diligently improve, what they have already received. Let us fear for ourselves, lest, by shutting our eyes against the light of his truth, we provoke him to withdraw it from us.

IV. He appeared, also, to the Apostles on their return to Jerusalem. As the feast of Pentecost, one of their grand solemnities, was approaching, their presence was required by the law. They arrived in that city some days before the festival, and were there favoured, as in Galilee, with the gracious visits of their Master, previous to his ascension *. Upon these occasions he renewed to them some of his former instructions, and confirmed their Apostolic commission. He directed their attention to the scriptures of the old Testament, that they might see the glorious plan of salvation to have been the same from the beginning, and be convinced that every thing had happened to him in perfect agreement with the ancient prophecies.

* Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Mark xvi. 15—18. Luke xxiv. 44—49. It is not clear, how often these visits were repeated, or whether the whole of the addresses, here mentioned, were delivered to the disciples at one time.

These

These they had overlooked, or grossly misconceived. But now he opened their understandings, and gave them clearer and more consistent views of what the sacred oracles had asserted concerning his death and resurrection. He taught them, that, in consequence of what he had done, sinners should be called upon to repent, and assured of the forgiveness of their sins through faith in his name. The necessity of conversion, and the offer of pardon through his blood, were some of the grand doctrines, which he commanded them to preach among all nations; and these doctrines are evidently founded on the supposition, that all men, without exception, are involved in a state of depravity and condemnation.

We remark, in an especial manner, that they were directed to open their proclamation of mercy at Jerusalem, that iniquitous and murderous city, where the Lord of glory had been crucified and slain. This was a wise appointment; because their bold defence of the Gospel, in the place where it might and must have been confuted, if it had been a mere fable, has clearly confirmed its truth. We admire, also, the grace of Jesus here exhibited, in sending the first message of peace to his bloody persecutors, who but a few days before had cried out with malicious rage, "Away with him, crucify him." Who now can despair of obtaining forgiveness, when offenders, under a load of such aggravated guilt, are invited and entreated to return and live? Let those, who have sinned the most heinously and with the greatest obduracy, be encouraged to listen to the publication of the Gospel, which

which has opened a way for their reconciliation and acceptance with God. Behold! "where ſin abounded, grace did much more abound*."

Jeſus charged his Apoſtles to bear a faithful teſtimony of theſe things, wherever they ſhould go, and aſſured them that they ſhould be qualified for their office by the influence of the Holy Ghoſt, which they were directed to wait for in Jeruſalem a few days longer. He reminded them, that he now poſſeſſed abſolute and ſupreme authority, and that both heaven and earth were ſubjected to his dominion. As univerſal Lord, he ſent them forth to the uttermoſt parts of the world, to preach the Goſpel to the whole human ſpecies. He inſtructed them to endeavour, among all nations, to make proſelytes to his religion, and to baptize all, who profeſſed ſubmiſſion, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt †." He declared, that every one conforming to this ſacramental rite, and maintaining real faith in him, ſhould be admitted to a ſtate of eternal bliſs and glory; but at the ſame time he denounced the divine vengeance, in its moſt terrible effects of everlaſting

* Rom. v. 20.

† This form of words, appointed to be uſed in Chriſtian baptiſm, is generally urged, and with great propriety, as a deciſive proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, and will, probably, be the means of ſupporting that doctrine to the end of time. For here, not only are the three perſons diſtinctly mentioned, but divine honour and worſhip are aſcribed to each; ſince all, who are baptized, are dedicated to the ſervice of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, and taught to depend upon them, and give glory to them, for the bleſſings of redemption.

miſery,

misery, against every unbelieving sinner. To confirm the message of his Apostles, he promised to endue them with various miraculous powers: and, after enjoining them to inculcate upon their converts a sincere regard to the principles and duties of the Gospel, he added a gracious assurance of his own continual presence with them, and with his Church, even till the consummation of all things.

Thus far he has proved himself true to his word. The Apostles, to whom he delivered this important commission, were fitted for their office by the abundant influence of his Spirit. By an extraordinary measure of wisdom, zeal, and courage, they were enabled to preach and propagate Christianity from kingdom to kingdom, to the extremities of the earth; and at the same time the many signs and wonders, which they wrought, have given a weight and validity to their doctrines.

We enjoy the benefit of their instructions and labours: and we bless God, that, though the supernatural operations, which they performed, are now ceased, the same Gospel is published among ourselves. It is the will of Jesus, that the light of his truth should still shine upon the world; and the ministers, who go forth under his direction, maintain no other principles, than what he commanded to be taught. They preach repentance and remission of sins through faith in his blood. They declare, as absolutely as the Apostles could, "He, who believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;" and they are also constrained to add, on the same authority, that most offensive denunciation, "He, who believeth not, shall be damned."

We have been received into his Church by baptiſm, and are his profeſſed diſciples. We ſhould be reminded, then, that we are ſolemnly devoted to God in his Covenant, and laid under the ſtrongeſt obligations to Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, whoſe name is named upon us. Are we walking conſiſtently with theſe engagements? Let us not depend upon the mere initiatory right of the ſacramental water, as if this would enſure ſalvation, but enquire, if we are joined to Chriſt by a true and lively faith, the want of which muſt expoſe us to everlaſting deſtruction. Let us ſearch and judge ourſelves impartially. The matter to be examined is of unſpeakable importance: it is no leſs than this, whether we ſhall be ſaved or periſh for ever.

The miniſters of Chriſt are called to an arduous employment, even as the Apoſtles were; and a ſenſe of their own inſufficiency would totally diſcourage them, if their exalted Maſter had not pledged himſelf for their ſupport. But, confiding in his promiſe, "I am with you alway," they may cheerfully expect all needful aſſiſtance, and rejoice in the hope, that they ſhall not labour in vain. The violence of perſecution, or the prevalence of corrupt doctrine, may ſometimes excite their fears, as if the very exiſtence of the Church was endangered. But let them remember, that Jeſus is engaged to ſecure its continuance "even unto the end of the world." The veſſel may be toſſed upon a tempeſtuous ſea, but He ſitteth at the helm; and we ſhould be ſatisfied to leave it under his care. Whatever oppoſition he may be pleaſed

to

to permit, his truth ſhall remain and proſper in the earth: "the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it *." The ſame gracious declaration may likewiſe animate and enliven private Chriſtians. He, whom they ſerve, will ſtand by them and ſave them; for, though his bodily preſence be removed, he hath ſaid to every believer, "I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee †." O truſt in him, and diſmiſs your fears! He will guide you through the intricate mazes of life, protect you from the aſſaults of your ſtrongeſt enemies, and comfort your drooping ſpirits in ſeaſons of ſevereſt affliction.

How many important conſequences follow from the reſurrection of Jeſus! Let us briefly advert to ſome of thoſe advantages, which reſult to his faithful people.

1. If Jeſus be riſen indeed, then the ſacrifice, which he has offered, is accepted; juſtice is ſatisfied; and nothing further is required for the expiation of our guilt. "He was delivered for our offences," and, when he was diſcharged from his confinement in the grave, the Lord God declared in effect, that every demand was anſwered, that the ranſom was ſufficient, and that pardon and peace were fully procured by this atonement. Therefore "he was raiſed again for our juſtification ‡." In dependence on the blood of the croſs, we may take up that ſong of holy exultation, "Who ſhall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that juſtifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Chriſt that died, yea rather, that is riſen again §."

* Matt. xvi. 18. † Heb. xiii. 5.
‡ Rom. iv. 25. § viii. 33, 34.

2. By

2. By the reſurrection of Jeſus we perceive, that he is able to ſupply the neceſſities of his people. Let us hear his own exalted declaration, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore *:" and let us remember, that the life, which he now poſſeſſes, he employs for the benefit of his Church. What ſtrong conſolation does this adminiſter! In that ſtate of glorious exiſtence, to which he is reſtored, what cannot he effect or beſtow? This ſubject will be reſumed; but, for the preſent, let us rejoice, that, "being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, we ſhall be ſaved by his life †." He has power "to ſtrengthen ſuch as do ſtand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted; and to raiſe up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet ‡." Let us humbly ſolicit, and thankfully receive, that grace, which he waits to communicate to them that aſk him.

3. Since Jeſus is revived, it appears undeniably that he has overcome death and the grave, and will make us partakers of his victory. He roſe like a mighty conqueror, and proved himſelf ſuperior to thoſe formidable opponents. But he roſe, alſo, in the name and as the repreſentative of his people. The pains of diſſolution await them, and their bodies muſt be conſigned to the duſt; but he will bring them up with triumph and great glory, and they ſhall reign with him for ever and ever. How ſhould this proſpect animate and enliven your ſouls, if you have "known the power of his reſurrection," and believed in his name!

* Rev. i. 18. † Rom. v. 10. ‡ Litany.

How different will be your portion, who remain in ignorance and contempt of him! You, alſo, ſhall be raiſed; but you will "awake to ſhame and everlaſting contempt *." You ſhall come forth, however reluctantly, and feel the vengeance of that Almighty Saviour, whoſe counſels of mercy you rejected: for then nothing ſhall "hide you from the face of Him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb †." May you now hear his voice, calling you to repentance; and, by the grace of his Spirit, may you, who are "dead in ſins," be "quickened together with Chriſt!" So ſhall you be "raiſed up together, and made to ſit together in heavenly places in Chriſt Jeſus ‡." Amen.

* Dan. xii. 2. † Rev. vi. 16. ‡ Eph. ii. 5, 6.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 44.

Jesus ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, as our High priest, Benefactor, and King.

After considering the whole of our Lord's continuance upon earth, his holy conduct, miracles, and doctrines, his sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection, we might be expected to close the account of this astonishing character. But it may tend to increase the hope and joy of our souls, to enquire, in what state he now dwells, and in what momentous concerns his reassumed life is occupied. This opens a fresh and extensive subject, which may enlarge our conceptions of his glory and grace. He is removed to the bright world above, but he has not relinquished the object, for which he became incarnate. There are those even here below, who yet maintain spiritual communion with him, and who receive constant proofs of his affectionate regard and watchful care. May every reader be so acquainted with the Saviour, as to be a witness of his power, faithfulness, and love, and recommend him to the notice and admiration of others! We observe,

 I. He

I. He aſcended into heaven. Various types and prophecies referred to this event. The entrance of the Jewiſh high prieſt into the holy of holies on the ſolemn day of atonement, was a ſtriking repreſentation of the Meſſiah's going up to appear in the immediate preſence of God*. The exaltation of the ark upon the hill of Zion, prefigured the ſame thing. David, therefore, in many of his pſalms, is led from this very circumſtance to ſpeak in ſuch elevated language, as can be applied only to the important ſubject before us †.

Jeſus himſelf, alſo, both before and after his reſurrection, foretold his own aſſumption. "In my Father's houſe," ſaid he, "are many manſions: I go to prepare a place for you:"—"I leave the world, and go to the Father:"—"I aſcend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God ‡." The event, which anſwered to theſe declarations, is recorded with great exactneſs.

The Apoſtles returned to Jeruſalem a little before the feaſt of Pentecoſt, and, being there aſſembled together, were favoured with the preſence of their divine Maſter §. He conducted them out of the city to the mount of Olives, even to the confines of Bethany, the place which he had ſo frequently viſited. In this interview, doubtleſs, they received many important inſtructions.

* Heb. ix. 7, 11, 12. † Pſal. xxiv. xlvii. lxviii.
‡ John xiv. 2. xvi. 28. xx. 17.
§ Mark xvi. 19, &c. Luke xxiv. 50, &c. Acts i. 4—12.

He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, till they had obtained the promised influence of the Holy Ghost. They enquired, whether he intended at that time to restore the kingdom to Israel; for they concluded, that he was about to accomplish some great object, and still entertained the expectation of temporal grandeur and dominion, as annexed to the reign of the Messiah. But, to restrain their curiosity about the state in which his Church should be fixed, he observed, that they were not permitted to know the secret purposes of God. He exhorted them to attend to their proper duty, and assured them, that, as they were appointed to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, they should soon be qualified for the arduous work by the assistance of the Spirit.

He then lifted up his hands, with great solemnity, as did the Jewish high priest over the people *, and blessed them, commending them to the divine protection. In that posture, so expressive of his dignity, and with words of kindness in his mouth, he was separated from them, and ascended up to heaven in a slow, majestic manner. They beheld him rising, in a splendid form, till at length their eyes could follow him no longer: a bright cloud received him; and he entered with a numerous retinue, and amidst the joyful acclamations of Angels, into his Father's courts above.

His disciples, filled with devout admiration, remained fixed, probably, in prayer and praise, worship-

* Lev. ix. 22.

ping their exalted Lord and Maſter, till two of his bright attendants came to inform them, that Jeſus, who was then taken up to glory, would return to the earth again at the end of time, with the ſame marks of dignity and triumph. Nothing more could be wanted to confirm their faith, or gladden their hearts. According to their Lord's command, they took up their abode at Jeruſalem, where they continued to be engaged in all religious exerciſes, till the Holy Ghoſt deſcended, and by his miraculous powers enabled them to go forth, to preach and propagate the Goſpel throughout the world.

Such is the authentic relation which is given us, and with this account the hiſtory of the four Evangeliſts is cloſed. The beloved diſciple aſſures us, that, out of the numerous tranſactions of the Saviour, a few only are ſelected, and that the ſole deſign of this ſacred narrative is, to induce men to believe on Jeſus for their eternal ſalvation *. Ah! how great is their perverſeneſs and ſtupidity, who, while they can eagerly attend to every trifling occurrence, diſregard theſe matters, ſo aſtoniſhing and ſo infinitely momentous! This is worſe than abſurdity, it is the baſeſt wickedneſs, the higheſt contempt of God. All thoſe, therefore, who deſpiſe and reject his mercy, tendered to them in the Goſpel of his Son, will be left without excuſe. Every article of this well-atteſted record will riſe up in judgment to condemn them.

* John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 24, 25.

But what do we conclude from the event laſt mentioned? We obſerve,

1. By our Lord's aſcenſion his dignity was diſplayed, not ſo much upon earth, as in the world above. His triumph before men is reſerved for a future day: but, when he went up to heaven, the celeſtial ſpirits, who ſurround the throne of God, beheld his glory, waited on him as his ſervants, and ſang his praiſes. "The chariots of God," on which he then rode with victorious majeſty, "are twenty thouſand, even thouſands of Angels *." According to David's ſublime deſcription, his attendants fly before him, and demand an admiſſion for the illuſtrious conqueror in ſuch words as theſe, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlaſting doors; and the King of glory ſhall come in." The enquiry is made, "Who is this King of glory?" and the anſwer is returned, "The Lord, ſtrong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle;—the Lord of hoſts, He is the King of glory †." The gates being thrown open to receive him, acclamations of joy and ſhouts of loudeſt applauſe are heard through the celeſtial manſions. The Father himſelf welcomes his approach, and ſays, "Thou art my Son, ſit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footſtool: Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ‡."

The holy Angels had beheld with amazement their incarnate God, ſuffering, bleeding, dying: but then they celebrated his triumph, when they ſaw, that by

* Pſal. lxviii. 17. † xxiv. 7—10. ‡ Heb. i. 5, 8, 13.

the ſacrifice of himſelf he had defeated the daring purpoſes of infernal ſpirits, "had ſpoiled principalities and powers, and made a ſhew of them openly *." "The number of them was ten thouſand times ten thouſand, and thouſands of thouſands, ſaying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb, that was ſlain, to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and ſtrength, and honour, and glory, and bleſſing †." Surely it becometh us upon earth to echo back this ſong with warmeſt affections, rejoicing in that complete victory which our Jeſus has obtained over ſin, Satan, death, and the grave, and in that exaltation which he now poſſeſſes.

The aſcenſion, of which we ſpeak, is not that of the Godhead merely, which, if intelligible, would be nothing wonderful; it is that of the MAN Chriſt Jeſus. The human nature, which was aſſumed in the virgin's womb, and ſuffered on the croſs, was raiſed to heaven, and admitted to a participation of the throne of God. In order to recompenſe the voluntary humiliation of Jeſus, and diſplay his ability to ſave, "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue ſhould confeſs, that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father ‡." Let us, therefore, regard him in this ſtate of elevated dignity with profound adoration. Let us look up to him for grace, mercy, and peace; the bleſſings, which we continually

* Col. ii. 15. † Rev. v. 11, 12. ‡ Phil. ii. 9—11.

need,

need, and which he alone is able to beſtow. Let us proſtrate ourſelves, as guilty criminals, with unfeigned ſubjection at his feet, and we ſhall ſhortly be advanced to his preſence, and ſhare his bliſs and glory. For we obſerve,

2. By our Lord's aſcenſion, an entrance into heaven is ſecured for all his faithful followers. He went up, not in his own name only, but in that of his people, as their head and repreſentative. According to the Covenant, he demanded the kingdom for thoſe, whom he had purchaſed by his blood, and then took poſſeſſion on their behalf. How animating is the conſideration to all thoſe, who, oppreſſed with a ſenſe of their guilt and miſery, "have fled for refuge" to this gracious Saviour! It may ſeem, as if the holy manſions were barred againſt them for their unworthineſs, and all expectation of admiſſion were preſumptuous. But Jeſus hath opened, "and no man ſhutteth *." "I go," ſaid he, "to prepare a place for you:—and I will come again, and receive you unto myſelf; that, where I am, there ye may be alſo †." He aſſured his diſciples, that his immortality would be their ſecurity; and therefore his reception into glory is a pledge, that they ſhall not be caſt out: "Becauſe I live, ye ſhall live alſo ‡." He alſo declared, long after his aſcenſion, for the encouragement of all who fight under the banner of his croſs, "To him that overcometh will I grant to ſit with me in my throne §."

What, then, ſhould damp your joy, or ſhake your confidence, if you have believed in his name? Look

* Rev. iii. 7. † John xiv. 2, 3. ‡ 19. § Rev. iii. 21.

up

up to the higheſt heavens, and there ſee your elder Brother, who holds the kingdom for you, till you arrive at the proper age to take poſſeſſion in your own perſons. You are the members of his body; and you ſhall ſhortly be with your exalted Head. Jeſus, "the fore-runner, is for you entered into that within the veil *." Can you want any further aſſurance, that you and all his redeemed company ſhall follow him, and attain the glorious abode, to which he is gone before?

II. He now ſitteth at the right hand of God. This is an important article of our creed, from which we may derive ſtrong conſolation. David predicted, that his Lord Meſſiah ſhould be fixed in that ſtate of high advancement, till all oppoſition be effectually ſubdued †; and, in various places of the new teſtament, this prophecy is declared to be fulfilled in Jeſus ‡. He himſelf foretold it, even in his deepeſt abaſement, when he ſtood before the Jewiſh council, arraigned as a criminal: "Hereafter," ſaid he, "ſhall the Son of man ſit on the right hand of the power of God §." This was not a vain boaſt: the fact is ſufficiently atteſted by thoſe, to whom it was revealed by the Spirit, that "he is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, Angels, and authorities, and powers being made ſubject unto him ‖."

We attempt not to deſcribe the glory of the celeſtial world, which is ſo far beyond our comprehenſion, that

* Heb. vi. 19, 20. † Pſal. cx. 1. ‡ Matt. xxii. 44. Acts ii. 34, 35. 1 Cor. xv. 25. Heb. i. 13. § Luke xxii. 69. ‖ 1 Pet. iii. 22.

we

we ſhould ſoon be loſt in the ſublimity of the ſubject. Yet it is not difficult to underſtand ſomething of what is meant to be conveyed, in the account of our Lord's preſent ſituation. "The right hand of God" does not imply that He has any corporeal ſubſtance or parts of a body. But, as with us the right hand is the chief inſtrument of action, generally put forth when our ſtrength is exerted, and therefore uſed to denote power, ſo this phraſe expreſſes the abſolute and uncontrollable dominion of Jehovah. The right hand alſo, with men, is the place of honour and diſtinction: there cannot be a ſeat of higher exaltation than that which is neareſt to the king, the right hand of majeſty. So far, then, is clear, that the ſtate, which our Lord poſſeſſes in heaven, is that of ſupreme authority and moſt elevated dignity. In that ſtate "he ſits," by which his continuance in it is evidently repreſented. But as this is the poſture only of Him, who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords," the words may alſo be intended to ſuggeſt the idea of his ſovereign greatneſs.

If it be ſaid, that Stephen, when he beheld "the heavens opened," ſaw Jeſus "STANDING on the right hand of God *," it is replied, that the Saviour might probably, on that ſolemn occaſion, "appear ſtanding to Stephen, as ready to aſſiſt him, as ready to plead for him, as ready to receive him †."

We enquire further, What is the grand diſtinction, what the peculiar employment, of Jeſus in his exaltation? This is an intereſting ſubject; but it involves ſo many things, which are too high for us,

* Acts vii. 56. † Bp. Pearſon on the Creed.

that

that "we cannot order our ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs." Yet we may advance a little. It is clearly declared, that he is the object of worſhip to all the celeſtial hoſt: they fall upon their faces before his throne, with profound adoration. We need not fear, then, to imitate their example, or to aſcribe to him "the kingdom, the power, and the glory." O that all the inhabitants of the earth may be filled with admiration of his divine perfections, and join with the angelic choir in ſinging, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth *."

The attention of Jeſus is not confined to heaven: ſtill "his delights are with the ſons of men †." His heart is fixed on accompliſhing the work of love, for which he aſſumed our nature. His Church is the object of his care: for its enlargement, protection, and proſperity, he is anxious; and he will continue to manage its concerns till the conſummation of all things, when the grand ſcheme will be completed. If we belong to this favoured ſociety, we ſhall have buſineſs of importance to tranſact with him every day. The great art of the Chriſtian life is to maintain ſuitable affections towards this exalted Perſonage, who "ſitteth on the right hand of God." For this purpoſe, we ſhould remember,

1. He is our High Prieſt. As ſuch, he undertook to expiate our guilt by his atoning ſacrifice, and procure us free acceſs unto the Father by the prevalency of his interceſſion. The Jewiſh high prieſts were types of Jeſus. As they went within the veil

* Rev. xix. 6. † Prov. viii. 31.

of the temple before the mercy-ſeat, on behalf of the people, and were required to preſent there the blood of various offerings; ſo Jeſus hath "entered into the holy place by his own blood *." He has no need to repeat the oblation, which he made; but he pleads its efficacy, and prays, that as many as believe, in the utmoſt parts of the earth, and to the end of time, may receive all its benefits. The voice of the prophets and apoſtles is full and loud on this ſubject. He, in particular, whoſe pen was moſt employed for the defence and promulgation of the Goſpel, has left a record, which affords the ſtrongeſt proofs and cleareſt illuſtrations of the Saviour's ſacerdotal character †.

In what manner his mediation in heaven is conducted, we do not pretend to explain. He aſks, he claims, the bleſſings, for which he died; he exhibits his crucified body, as an offering, and "a ſacrifice to God for a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour ‡." A conſideration this, which muſt prevail: and let us rejoice, that it is urged in behalf of all thoſe, who by faith call upon his name.

The deſcription is a little varied, when Jeſus is ſpoken of as our Advocate; for this repreſentation refers to judicial proceedings. We are ſummoned to appear in court, and arraigned before the ſupreme tribunal. We are put upon our trial, and found guilty. What, then, ſhall prevent our condemnation, and the execution of the ſentence? Jeſus undertakes our cauſe, and offers a plea in our favour, alleging what

* Heb. ix. 12.

† St. Paul's Epiſtle to the Hebrews.

‡ Eph. v. 2.

he himſelf endured on the croſs. Thus the arm of juſtice, ready to fall upon us, is arreſted; and pardon, peace, and ſalvation, are procured.

We ſhall never perceive any value or ſuitableneſs in the character of the Saviour, as here given, till we are deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of our guilt and convinced of our unfitneſs to ſtand before the holy Lord God. If, however, we are thus touched with ſhame and fear, we ſhall rejoice in having ſuch an One to mediate for us, through whom we may be confident of obtaining acceptance. This will encourage us to ſay both to ourſelves and our fellow-ſinners, "Having therefore, brethren, boldneſs to enter into the holieſt by the blood of Jeſus,—and having an High Prieſt over the houſe of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full aſſurance of faith *." We may defy every enemy, and challenge every accuſer, depending on the gracious interpoſition of our Redeemer. "Who ſhall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that juſtifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Chriſt that died, yea rather, that is riſen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who alſo maketh interceſſion for us †."

2. He is our great Benefactor, the ſource of all ſpiritual bleſſings, "the author and finiſher of our faith." He ſits upon a throne of grace, and exerciſes the moſt enlarged munificence. When he "aſcended on high," he "received gifts for men ‡," the abundant influences of the Holy Spirit, which would not otherwiſe have been communicated to us. Theſe

* Heb. x. 19—22. † Rom. viii. 33, 34. ‡ Pſal. lxviii. 18.

were

were beſtowed on the Apoſtles in an extraordinary meaſure: but, in every age of the Church, all the light, ſtrength, and comfort, which any of his people poſſeſs, are derived from him. For "unto every one of us is given grace, according to the meaſure of the gift of Chriſt *." He is the vine, we are the branches †; and therefore he alone can miniſter nouriſhment, for the purpoſes of our ſpiritual ſupport, growth, and fruitfulneſs. He is the head, we are the members ‡; and therefore to him we muſt look for guidance, vigour, and protection. His faithful followers will all join their grateful atteſtations, and ſay, "Of his fulneſs have all we received §." O let us love, and praiſe, and ſerve him, with our warmeſt affections! "Bleſſed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our ſalvation ‖." Thoſe only can treat his character with contempt or indifference, who ſuppoſe that they are "rich, and increaſed with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not, that they are wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked ⁜."

3. He is our King. To eſtabliſh a government in the world, was the great object of his incarnation. Yet he appeared in a ſtate of extreme weakneſs, and was treated with ſcornful inſolence. How different his ſituation now! "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth **." He reigns enthroned in glorious majeſty, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name

* Eph. iv. 7. † John xv. 5. ‡ Col. ii. 19. § John i. 16. ‖ Pſal. lxviii. 19. ⁜ Rev. iii. 17. ** Matt. xxviii. 18.

that

that is named, not only in this world, but alſo in that which is to come *." The adminiſtration of the affairs of univerſal nature is committed to Jeſus. The diſpenſations of providence are all ordered according to his ſovereign pleaſure. But the principal conſideration is, that he continues to carry on the plan for eſtabliſhing a kingdom of grace among men.

The human race are univerſally engaged in a ſyſtem of rebellion againſt Heaven. Jeſus ſends to entreat their ſubmiſſion, and perſuade them to lay down their arms. His miniſters are continually calling to ſinners in his name, " Be ye reconciled to God †;" and thoſe, to whom the Goſpel proves effectual, are " made willing in the day of his power ‡." Then they are aſhamed of their paſt oppoſition, and yield themſelves with unfeigned ſubjection to his diſpoſal. They acknowledge the juſtice of his claims to their obedience, approve of his laws as " holy, juſt, and good," and promiſe to regulate their conduct by a regard to his will. Theſe are his " peculiar people," reſcued from the tyranny of Satan, and tranſlated into the kingdom of Jeſus §.

Happy, happy thoſe, who thus reſign themſelves to the government of " the Prince of peace!" Like a gracious ſovereign, he diſpenſes to them a free pardon, without any exception of perſons, he receives them under his care, provides for all their neceſſities, and defends them from all hoſtile aſſaults. In conſequence of their fidelity to him, they will be attacked by various enemies; and their conflict may

* Eph. i. 21. † 2 Cor. v. 20. ‡ Pſal. cx. 3. § Col. i. 13.

be

be ſharp. But, as they fight under his banner, he will ſecure to them the final conqueſt, and not ſuffer himſelf to be deprived of the meaneſt of his faithful ſubjects. You, therefore, who have vowed allegiance, be of good courage, truſt and rejoice in his power, truth, and love.

"He muſt reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet *." This expreſſion is taken from the cuſtom of ancient warriors, who, exulting over their vanquiſhed adverſaries, commanded them to be led in chains, and then trode upon their necks †. Thus will Jeſus triumph in the end, and prove the completeneſs of his victory. All oppoſition to his grand deſign ſhall be entirely ſubdued. The conteſt, which his people maintain againſt Satan, ſhall ſoon be concluded to their honour and unſpeakable felicity ‡. Their inward depravity, that "body of death," under which they groan, ſhall be purged away, and its painful aſſaults experienced no more for ever §. Death, alſo, the laſt of their enemies, ſhall be finally deſtroyed ‖. While their bodies are confined in the grave, they appear to be under its dominion; but Jeſus has pledged himſelf for their reſcue. He will raiſe them from the duſt, and clothe them with immortality. "Then ſhall be brought to paſs the ſaying that is written, Death is ſwallowed up in victory ⊥.

As many as refuſe ſubmiſſion to his government, ſhall diſplay his power and juſtice in their everlaſting pu-

* 1 Cor. xv. 25. † Joſh. x. 24. ‡ Rom. xvi. 20.
§ vii. 24, 25. ‖ 1 Cor. xv. 26. ⊥ 1 Cor. xv. 54.

 niſhment

nishment. "As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers *." Thus even the wretched inhabitants of hell will remain an eternal monument of the absolute and uncontrollable dominion of Jesus. The very Devils shall feel the weight of his arm, and receive an increase of torment for their opposition to his kingdom. It is his determination "to subdue all things unto himself:" and therefore it will be our wisdom, as it is our bounden duty, to bow to his sceptre, and live in cheerful obedience to his precepts. O "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little! Blessed are all they, that put their trust in him †."

* Rev. ii. 27. † Psalm ii. 12.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 45.

Jesus will return in his glory—judge the world with righteousness—and then resign his mediatorial kingdom.

JESUS, who ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, is occupied in carrying on, from age to age, a plan of extensive mercy; a plan, of which we can form no adequate conceptions, but which, even from our present imperfect views, should excite us continually to the exercise of holy admiration, gratitude, and love. This plan will soon be completed, and we shall be called upon to contemplate it in its various parts, with a degree of light and information, which we are now incapable of receiving.

We forbear to enlarge upon the grand scheme of providence, by which the government of Jesus will be supported and advanced, till all opposition be subdued, and his empire be universal. Suffice it to observe, that "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ *." We forbear to enquire, what will be the state of things at that glorious period, when Jesus, together with his saints,

* Rev. xi. 15.

ſhall reign upon the earth for a thouſand years *. Let us endeavour to look beyond all the tranſactions, which are yet to take place in the preſent ſyſtem, to the ſolemn cloſe and final conſummation. Let us direct our attention to the ſecond advent of our Redeemer, the conflagration of this terreſtrial globe, the general reſurrection, the univerſal judgment, and the appointment of men to heaven or to hell, according to their characters. What awful ſubjects are theſe! Who can read or think of them, without the moſt ſerious impreſſions and earneſt prayers? "O Lord Jeſus Chriſt, grant that at thy ſecond coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy ſight †!"

Jeſus is already poſſeſſed of unſpeakable glory, being exalted "far above all principality and power," and worſhipped by the Angels, which ſurround his throne. But we have remarked, that, though he be "Lord of all," his majeſty is not yet publicly exhibited on earth. At his promiſed return, however, his triumph will be celebrated, and his dignity univerſally acknowledged. The holy ſcriptures make frequent mention of that ſeaſon. It is called "the great day," for the events of every other are comparatively trifling. It is "the day of God," becauſe Jehovah will no longer leave ſinners to their own ways, but vindicate his ſovereign authority. It is "the day of Chriſt," ſince his character will then be diſplayed: "his enemies ſhall lick the duſt ‡:"

* Rev. xx. 6. † Collect for the third Sunday in Advent.
‡ Pſal. lxxii. 9.

"every knee ſhall bow at his name, and every tongue confeſs, that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father *."

This, therefore, is ſtyled "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt †." The deſcriptions of it are the moſt auguſt and exalted, which can be conceived. Language fails to give us any adequate ideas of the divine majeſty, which will then be exhibited in the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt. Moſes could not behold the brightneſs of his preſence upon mount Sinai: but his manifeſtation, at the laſt day, will be inconceivably more ſplendid and magnificent. Thus he himſelf ſpeaks of it: "The Son of man ſhall come in the clouds of heaven, in his glory, and in the glory of his Father, and all the holy Angels with him: then ſhall he ſit upon the throne of his glory; and before him ſhall be gathered all nations ‡." Such, alſo, are the declarations of his Apoſtles, "The Lord ſhall deſcend from heaven with a ſhout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God." "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye ſhall ſee him, and they alſo which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth ſhall wail becauſe of him. Even ſo, Amen §."

What a grandeur will be diſplayed in his retinue! The celeſtial world ſhall pour forth its inhabitants, to accompany their King; and, from the number and ſplendour of his attendants, we ſhall then be convinced of the greatneſs of his majeſty. Thoſe "miniſtering

* Phil. ii. 10, 11. † Tit. ii. 13. ‡ Matt. xvi. 27. xxiv. 30. xxv. 31, 32. § 1 Theſſ. iv. 16. Rev. i. 7.

ſpirits," who are as "a flaming fire," ſurpaſs in ſtrength and brightneſs all the conceptions we can form. Even one of this hoſt has been enough to confound ſome of the moſt holy men upon earth. What an appearance, then, will be exhibited by the thouſands and millions, who ſhall grace the triumph of the Saviour! "They do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word *." By his direction they will proclaim the ſummons for all mankind to ſtand before him. "He ſhall ſend his Angels with a great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall gather together his elect †." "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,—the trumpet ſhall ſound, and the dead ſhall be raiſed ‡." "All that are in the graves ſhall hear his voice, and ſhall come forth, they that have done good, unto the reſurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the reſurrection of damnation §." "The heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, the earth alſo, and the works that are therein, ſhall be burned up ‖." "A great white throne" appears, and "the Ancient of days" ſits upon it, "from whoſe face the earth and the heaven fly away, and there is found no place for them. The dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before God, and the books are opened ┼."

Thus all, in that numerous aſſembly, ſhall be witneſſes of the honour of Chriſt; but with how different affections will they meet him! There are thoſe, who, with holy exultation, will then ſing,

* Pſal. ciii. 20. † Matt. xxiv. 31. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 52. § John v. 28, 29. ‖ 2 Pet. iii. 10. ┼ Dan. vii. 9, 10. Rev. xx. 11, 12.

"Lo!

"Lo! this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will ſave us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his ſalvation *." Others, confounded and terrified at his preſence, ſhall ſay to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand †."

The Lord Jeſus, then, at his glorious advent, will proceed "to judge the world with righteouſneſs ‡." To this high office he is expreſsly appointed by the Covenant. It is committed to him, in order that the dignity of his character may appear; "that all men ſhould honour the Son, even as they honour the Father §." It properly belongs to him, as the ſovereign, univerſal King. Judgment, being a part of executive government, appertains to majeſty; and, therefore, Jeſus, who is "Lord of all," poſſeſſes the right of exerciſing judicature over the ſubjects of his dominion.

It will be one of the important objects of that day, to exhibit the perfections of God, which are now obſcured, and to vindicate his preſent diſpenſations, the equity and wiſdom of which are frequently diſputed and denied. Such is his amazing condeſcenſion, that he will ſubmit his general proceedings to our inſpection, and call on us to declare our approbation. The reaſons of his dealings with

* Iſa. xxv. 9. † Rev. vi. 16, 17. ‡ Pſal xcvi. 13.
§ John v. 23.

us in this world are often concealed. "His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known *." We foolishly presume to speculate, cavil, and find fault; when we ought to acquiesce, with patience and thankfulness, in his disposal. We may consider him, as saying to each one of us, "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter †." Every thing, even then, may not be perfectly explained; but so much, at least, of the divine conduct will be laid before us, as to convince us, that in all its parts it has uniformly been "holy, and just, and good." It is expressly asserted, That will be "the day of revelation of the righteous judgment of God ‡." Under dark dispensations, therefore, when our minds are perplexed with doubts and fears, let us learn to wait for clearer information. Our difficulties will soon be removed, and our objections answered. The severest calamities, which believers endure, will appear to have been appointed in wisdom, faithfulness, and love. They will all with one voice cry out, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints § !"

Another purpose to be effected in the judgment, and what our plan leads us chiefly to insist on, is, the manifestation of the wonderful scheme of redemption, in its various connections and dependencies, and the public display of the dignity, the work, and offices of the Saviour. Jesus will then be acknowledged,

* Psal. lxxvii. 19. † John xiii 7. ‡ Rom. ii. 5. § Rev. xv. 3.

"over

"over all, God bleſſed for ever *." Indeed the perfections, which he muſt neceſſarily poſſeſs, as ſupreme and univerſal Judge, evidently prove, that he is ſuperior to the moſt exalted creatures. At the ſame time, the contraſt will be moſt aſtoniſhing, when his humiliation and grace are viewed in conjunction with his glory. He will be ſeen, not only as "King of kings, and Lord of lords," but as "the Lamb, that was ſlain:" nor will he be aſhamed to bear the marks of his ſufferings. His body ſtill retains the print of the nails in his hands and feet, and the hole in his pierced ſide, as the memorials of his crucifixion.

The nature and conſequences of the trial, which will then be inſtituted, and the qualifications of Jeſus for his high function, will appear from the following conſiderations.

1. He is wiſe. A clear diſcernment of the demands of the law, and of the different caſes of the perſons arraigned, is of peculiar importance in a judge: and this is what Jeſus poſſeſſes without any defect. He cannot be ignorant of the rule of duty, which he himſelf came to enforce and explain; nor can he poſſibly be miſtaken in the characters or conduct of thoſe, who are ſummoned before him. Every diſguiſe, which might blind the eyes of men, is removed in his preſence. No vain pretences, however ſpecious, can deceive him; no falſe atteſtations obtain credit at his bar: for "He ſearcheth the reins and hearts †." He may be pleaſed to admit the teſtimony of others, yet he ſtands in no need of their

* Rom. ix. 5. † Rev. ii. 23.

information.

information. He might convict or acquit, on the ground of his own unerring obſervation; every ſecret thing is noted down in his book, and he knows "every man's work, of what ſort it is." How different are human courts of judicature, where the evidence may be ſo defective, or ſuch ſhameful impoſitions practiſed, that the guilty may eſcape, and the innocent ſuffer!

It will be allowed, that judgment properly belongs to Jeſus, if we obſerve,

2. He is juſt. However clearly men underſtand the caſes, which are ſubmitted to their deciſion, they may determine under the influence of corrupt motives, ſo as to "condemn the innocent blood," and "accept the perſons of the wicked *." But it is not poſſible, that Jeſus ſhould feel any prejudice or partiality, or be miſled by wrong affections. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right †?" "Juſtice and judgment are the habitation of his throne ‡." He is "Faithful and true, and in righteouſneſs he doth judge §." "There is no reſpect of perſons with him ‖." Accordingly, in claſſing the numerous aſſembly at his tribunal, he pays no regard to any other conſideration than that of their characters. For "he ſhall ſeparate them one from another, as a ſhepherd divideth his ſheep from the goats: and he ſhall ſet the ſheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left ┤."

A different ſentence awaits theſe different deſcriptions of men; but, even in that deciſion, he will manifeſt his own holineſs, truth, and equity. He

* Pſal. lxxxii. 2. xciv. 21. † Gen. xviii. 25. ‡ Pſal. lxxxix. 14. § Rev. xix. 11. ‖ Rom. ii. 11. ┤ Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

will

will condescend to declare the reasons, for which he admits some to his blissful presence in heaven, and dooms others to a state of everlasting punishment. Such as have believed in his name, are completely justified through his obedience; yet he will prove, that they are saved consistently with his eternal love of righteousness. It will appear, that they were renewed after his image "through sanctification of the Spirit," and that they had evinced the change by their habitual regard to his will, and by their pious labours. He will, therefore, produce their good works for his own glory, as well as the vindication of their characters. The impenitent will be confounded by the horrors of an accusing conscience, and by the sight of the Judge, who is privy to all their secret transactions of iniquity, and malignant dispositions. But he will, also, demonstrate the justice of their condemnation before the assembled universe, by publicly exhibiting their evil deeds, their neglect and contempt of every thing truly excellent. So that, however tremendous that state may be, to which they are appointed, none will presume to say, "My punishment is greater than I deserve."

We consider, further, the qualifications of Jesus for his office, while we observe

3. He is powerful. The whole proceedings of our courts of judicature would be trifling and absurd, if the judge possessed no authority to execute his sentence. The Lord Christ bears the sword: He is "the Almighty *;" "Strong is his hand, and high

* Rev. i. 8.

is his right hand*." Whoever may be disposed to arraign of the equity of his decision, it must be carried into effect. What his lips pronounce, he will instantly perform. Vain would be all resistance: for who shall dare to contend with Him? The gates of heaven shall be opened at his command, and admit his redeemed people: not one, of that society, can possibly be excluded. If he should say to us, "Enter ye into the joy of your Lord," the united force of the whole creation would be unable to prevent it. His word, also, will be with power, when he shall utter that tremendous doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed." Do any complain, or refuse to obey? Alas! to what purpose? The mandate is irresistible; it is enforced by omnipotence. Whoever, therefore, may wish or attempt to evade the sentence, it must take place. The wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power †."

Whilst we allow and maintain, that it is the prerogative of Jesus to execute judgment, let us not forget that "every one of us must give account of himself to Him ‡." With all seriousness and diligence, let us "prepare to meet our God §." Let us dwell upon the awful subject, that it may leave a deeper impression upon our minds.

This judgment will be universal, as extending to the whole rational creation. The holy Angels will be interested, but we presume not to explain in what

* Psal. lxxxix. 13. † 2 Thess. i. 9. ‡ Rom. xiv. 12.
§ Amos iv. 12.

particular

particular manner. They will be gathered together, so as to become one body in Christ with all his saints, perfectly united under Him, and, probably, confirmed and secured in their happy and glorious state for ever *. The fallen spirits will be brought forth for public trial and condemnation. They are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day †." The baseness of their character, and especially their malignant opposition to Christ and his people, will then be manifested; and they will be consigned, on the clearest grounds of equity, to those mansions of horror and despair, where "there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

But the proceedings of that day are described, as having a peculiar reference to our world: and it is a consideration of the utmost moment to ourselves, that every individual of the human race will be summoned. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ‡." What an immense concourse! It must baffle our calculations. Adam, and his numerous progeny, even to his latest descendant, must stand together at the tribunal; nor will any one in that vast assembly pass unnoticed. How awful the thought! Each person will be examined with the same strictness and attention, as if no other were present, and feel himself not less interested, than if his own were the only case to be determined.

This judgment, then, will be particular, as extending to the minutest circumstance of our lives. The accuracy of such an investigation may justly excite the

* Eph. i. 10. Col. i. 20. † Jude 6. ‡ 2 Cor v. 10.

most

most serious apprehensions. Who can endure it? The whole of our actions will come under a close inspection: Yes, even those, which were carefully concealed from the observation of our fellow creatures upon earth, shall then be publicly exposed. For "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil *." It should be remembered, also, that the intercourse, we have had with each other in conversation, will be scrutinized with the same exactness. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment †." Nay further, Jesus, who searcheth the reins, takes notice of the thoughts, affections, desires, plans, and purposes, which have never appeared in outward effects. He declares, "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known ‡." Considering, then, "with whom we have to do," let us not content ourselves with mere regularity, or an external decency of conduct. Can we bear to have all our imaginations, wishes, and schemes, unfolded to the view of the assembled world? Does not the very apprehension of it cover us with confusion; especially as the event of the trial is so momentous?

This judgment is final. The eternal states of all mankind will be decided beyond the possibility of a change. There can lie no appeal to any other tribunal. It is the defect of human judicatories, that they frequently find it necessary or expedient to reverse the

* Eccles. xii. 14. † Matt. xii. 36. ‡ x. 26.

sentence,

sentence, which they have passed. But reasons of policy or mere compassion, which arise from our ignorance and weakness, cannot influence the proceedings of the court of heaven. No pardon, no mitigation of the doom, can be obtained for impenitent sinners, who shall be condemned by the righteous Judge of all. When he shall say to his redeemed people, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father," they will have no reason to dread an alteration in his dispositions, or a diminution of their happiness. No further probation will be appointed: but, the day of grace being closed, all mankind will be consigned to a state of bliss or misery, and that for ever. The great gulf will be fixed, so that it will be impossible to pass from one to the other *. Ah! where shall we dwell?

It remains only that we enquire briefly, what shall follow the solemn transactions of the last day; and this subject will conclude our observations on the character of Jesus. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power: for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet †." The important work, which he undertook, will be completed; his people brought home, and placed in full possession of the inheritance prepared for them, and all the opposers of his government entirely confounded and vanquished. There will, therefore, be no further occasion for the offices of Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor: the grand intention, for which they were first

* Luke xvi. 26. † 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

assumed,

aſſumed, will then be accompliſhed; and, the ſalvation being finiſhed, they will ceaſe. The dominion, now veſted in the hands of Jeſus for the attainment of a peculiar purpoſe, ſhall be again delivered to the Godhead, in the perſon of the Father. The kingdom, which we call mediatorial, ſhall be reſigned: the truſt, being diſcharged, ſhall be given up.

The people of Chriſt, who are the objects of his care, ſhall poſſeſs ſuch a perfection of purity, that his gracious agency, in repreſenting them before the throne, will be no longer neceſſary. In this life, we look to the Father, and he to us, only through the interpoſition of the Redeemer. But in heaven there will be this grand difference: we ſhall come to God, as it were immediately, like the bleſſed Angels, who ſtand in no need of one to introduce or plead for them. Thus "all things being ſubdued unto him, then ſhall the Son alſo himſelf be ſubject unto Him, that put all things under him, that God may be all in all *." Jeſus, as Mediator, ſhall retire, acknowledging that the peculiar authority, which he poſſeſſes in that office, had been delegated: the glory of the Deity ſhall be ſeen without a veil; all worſhip and adoration ſhall be aſcribed to Jehovah; and univerſal, abſolute dominion be maintained by him alone for ever.

This is confeſſed to be a myſterious ſubject; but the difficulty ariſes from our inability to form clear and ſuitable conceptions of the divine eſſence, and of that union of the two natures, which ſubſiſts in the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt. "We cannot order our

* 1 Cor. xv. 28.

ſpeech

ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs *:" but let us wait awhile, and the day will declare, what we preſume not to explain.

No argument can properly be drawn from the reſignation of the Redeemer's kingdom, to diſprove his Godhead, or original equality with the Father. This ſurrender, we have obſerved, refers to the truſt inveſted in him as Mediator; and in that capacity, it is allowed, he is ſubject. But it has appeared, through the conſideration of his whole character, that he poſſeſſes all the glories and perfections, which we can poſſibly aſcribe to Deity. Theſe he cannot deliver up; and therefore as God, he together with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, the one ſelf-exiſtent Jehovah, ſhall reign for ever and ever; "and of his kingdom there ſhall be no end †."

He will, likewiſe, continue to enjoy throughout eternity a peculiar honour, even in his human nature. He will ſtill be diſtinguiſhed as "Immanuel," though not as Mediator. He will remain the Head of his people, and they will be conſidered as in Him, ſtanding before God only by virtue of his blood, and his obedience unto death. The throne of the Lamb, as well as of the Lord God, ſhall be in the new Jeruſalem, and his ſervants ſhall ſerve him ‡. "The Lamb, which is in the midſt of the throne, ſhall feed them, and ſhall lead them unto living fountains of waters §." Thus "his name ſhall endure for ever ‖." The very man of Nazareth, who was crucified on mount Calvary,

* Job xxxvii. 19. † Luke i. 33. ‡ Rev. xxii. 3. § vii. 17. ‖ Pſal. lxxii. 17.

vary, ſhall poſſeſs a ſtate of glorious exaltation, even when the plan of redemption is completed, and ſhall be the object of everlaſting admiration, love, and praiſe, amongſt all the hoſts of heaven.

Do not our hearts burn with ſtrong deſires to participate of their bliſs, and join in their ſong? Then let us acquaint ourſelves with the character of Jeſus; for "no man cometh unto the Father but by Him *." Let us pray, that we may have clearer and more enlarged conceptions of his worth and excellency: for how ſmall a part do we yet perceive! Indeed, in our higheſt ſtate of advancement upon earth, our views will be obſcure and contracted. O! what rich diſcoveries are reſerved for the eternal world, to which we are haſtening! Do we not exult in the confidence, that the veil will be ſoon removed, and we ſhall "ſee the King in his beauty?" Then ſhall we cry out, with holy tranſport, as the queen of Sheba, "Behold, the half was not told me †." But, from the little which we now underſtand, may we be excited to love him with our warmeſt affections, and ſerve him with unwearied vigour and delight, till we be admitted into his beatific preſence, to reign with him in glory, as kings and prieſts, for ever and ever! Amen.

HALLELUJAH!

* John xiv. 6. † 1 Kings x. 7.

THE VIRGIN MARY.

CHAP. III.

Mary, descended from David—espoused to Joseph—informed of her miraculous conception—visited Elizabeth—brought forth Jesus at Bethlehem—attended at the temple for her purification—went into Egypt—expostulated with Jesus, for remaining at Jerusalem—met with a rebuke from him at Cana—accompanied him in his ministry—stood by his cross.

AFTER considering the life of the Redeemer, we may be disposed to treat with indifference every other history, as being, comparatively, of little importance. But, as in the natural world, though we look not immediately to the sun, we behold the effects of his light in the brightness of every object around us; so we may discover the grace and glory of Jesus in those whom he illuminates, and, from the view of their excellencies, may be led to regard him with the greater admiration.

We now direct our meditations to the character of the person, to whom he stood most nearly related in the flesh. We contemplate his virgin mother, who was not only "blessed among women," but honoured above all the crowned heads, which were ever distinguished on the earth. We cannot, indeed, in speak-

ing concerning her, accommodate ourſelves to the ſuperſtition of Romiſh devotees. They dare to addreſs her in fooliſh and idolatrous language, as if ſhe had the diſpoſal of all ſpiritual bleſſings, and even in heaven could command her Son, upon the throne of his glory, to anſwer their petitions. It is ſaid, that they offer as many prayers, if ſuch they may be called, to the holy virgin, as to the Lord God Almighty. Abhorred be this worſhip of a creature!

Nor do we attend to any abſurd traditionary legends, but enquire merely, what we may learn from her example, as recorded in the ſcriptures. A very ſhort account is given us: perhaps, this circumſtance was deſigned to check our vain curioſity, which might lead us to propoſe many unprofitable queſtions. We know nothing of her parentage, except that ſhe proceeded in a direct line from David: otherwiſe ſhe could not have been the mother of the promiſed Meſſiah. It appears, however, by numerous proofs, that her ſituation in life was obſcure, though ſhe obtained the high honour of introducing the Saviour into the world, that peculiar honour, to which the holy women of old moſt eagerly aſpired.

It had been foretold, that the Redeemer ſhould not only aſſume our nature, and ſpring from the royal family of David, in ſome of its reduced branches, but be born of a pure virgin*. Theſe predictions were exactly fulfilled. The genealogy of Mary is carefully preſerved, in order to ſhew her regular deſcent from David: and ſo low had that illuſtrious houſe then

* Gen. iii, 15. Pſal. cxxxii. 11. Iſa. xi. 1. vii. 14.

ſunk,

ſunk, that ſhe was in a very mean condition, eſpouſed to Joſeph, a poor carpenter, who was himſelf alſo of the ſame extraction. She ſtill remained immaculate, though betrothed. The marriage was not conſummated, when ſhe was acquainted with the gracious deſigns of heaven.

The Angel Gabriel carried her the information, that the Lord God looked upon her with a ſpecial regard, and deſigned to diſtinguiſh her above her ſex *. This extraordinary appearance and ſalutation excited aſtoniſhment and confuſion in her mind. He, however, diſperſed her fears, and encouraged her faith, while he proceeded to aſſure her, that ſhe ſhould be favoured of God in conceiving and bringing forth a Son, even the divine Redeemer, who ſhould eſtabliſh the promiſed kingdom of grace in the world. Mary expreſſed a holy admiration at the meſſage delivered, and yet objected her own virginity, which ſeemed inconſiſtent with ſuch an intention. The Angel then declared explicitly, that the conception ſhould be effected, not in a natural way, but by the immediate operation of the Holy Ghoſt. He obſerved further, that her couſin Elizabeth was in a ſtate of pregnancy at that very time, through a miraculous influence, and referred her to the Almighty power of God; which can inſtantly remove every difficulty, and accompliſh thoſe purpoſes, which we may conclude to be impoſſible. Mary preſumed not to diſpute with the heavenly viſitant, and replied only by teſtifying her humble and devout acquieſcence in the Lord's appointment. She

* Luke i. 26—38.

resigned herself to the disposal of God, desiring that she might be subservient to his will.

What an amiable pattern of meekness, faith, and submission, is here exhibited! She credited the divine message, and expected the completion of the promise, in this confidence, that God can do every thing, and will surely perform what he has said. Have we learned, in like manner, to cease from our vain objections, and depend upon his declarations with unfeigned simplicity? With what reluctance do we rest upon the word, which he has spoken; and with what petulance do we demand an explanation! The many curious questions we propose, and the foolish cavils we raise, prove to our shame, that we are "slow of heart to believe."

Though the honour, conferred upon the pious virgin was great, she was called by the miraculous conception to a peculiar measure of patience and resignation. According to human probabilities, it seemed likely to expose her to severe trials and dangers. What could she expect, when her pregnancy appeared, but to be separated from the man, to whom she was espoused? What, but to be reproached, perhaps condemned to die, as a base adulteress *? Yet she cheerfully submitted the event to God, and trusted him with the care of her character and life. Ah! how few possess such a disposition! How few are willing to acquiesce in those dispensations, or engage in those services, which may bring them into difficulties? Let us enquire, whether we can say sincerely, and without re-

* Deut. xxii. 23, 24.

serve,

ſerve, in whatever way God is pleaſed to intimate his pleaſure, " Be it unto me, according to thy word."

Soon after the conception, Mary viſited her couſin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptiſt, whoſe caſe had been mentioned by Gabriel *. This long journey was undertaken, with the view, probably, of receiving a confirmation of her faith, by a free communication with her devout relatives. Here we are admitted to a delightful interview between two affectionate and pious women, whoſe converſation will ſuggeſt ſome profitable inſtructions. They were both filled with the Holy Ghoſt, and ſpake in the moſt rapturous and elevated manner, praiſing God and comforting one another. Elizabeth received her with joy, congratulated her as favoured above her ſex, and accounted herſelf highly honoured in entertaining ſuch a gueſt.

Mary ſeemed to be overpowered with admiration of the divine goodneſs, and broke forth into expreſſions of livelieſt gratitude, and adoration. Her ſong, evidently dictated by inſpiration, bears a ſtriking reſemblance to that of Hannah. In the compariſon we ſee the ſame feelings, the ſame acknowledgment of a more than common bleſſing, of honour conferred on the unworthy, of unexpected grace and favour. Let us endeavour to ſtudy this animated paſſage, till we feel ſomething of Mary's devout and ardent affections, and each be conſtrained to cry out for himſelf, " My ſoul doth magnify the Lord, and my ſpirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." GOD MY SA-

* Luke i. 39—56.

VIOUR,—how aſtoniſhing, how delightful the myſtery! She exulted in the hope of obtaining redemption through the incarnation of this divine Perſonage, more than in being his mother according to the fleſh. She declared, indeed, her wonder and thankfulneſs for the honourable office, to which ſhe was appointed by the high and lofty One, whoſe name is holy; and then proceeded, from the conſideration of her own ſtate, to obſerve, that it is God's general plan, both in his providence and grace, to exalt the lowly and abaſe the proud, ſo that none may glory in his preſence. She concluded, as ſhe began, with admiring and praiſing him for that grand ſcheme of ſalvation, which he was about to accompliſh in remembrance of his mercy, and in performance of his promiſes to the ancient fathers.

Let us call upon ourſelves to bleſs the Lord for his goodneſs; for how great things has he done for us! We ſhould adore him, particularly, for the gift of his dear Son; the unſpeakable benefit being deſigned to extend unto us as well as unto Mary. But who feels any warmth of gratitude on this account? Are we properly aware of the advantages, which Jeſus came to beſtow? If not, how ſhall we "magnify the Lord?" Nay, may not thoſe, who are the favoured objects of his grace, be juſtly aſhamed of their ſtupor and inſenſibility, even while they are taking the words of thankſgiving into their mouths?

Mary continued with Elizabeth three months, and then returned to her accuſtomed reſidence at Nazareth. Her ſituation, upon its diſcovery, muſt have expoſed

exposed her to many ignominious censures, had not Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, been directed by a message from heaven to receive her for his wife *. He complied immediately, believing the account of the miraculous conception, and, probably on that ground, abstained from all knowledge of her, till the birth of her illustrious Son.

When the time of her delivery drew near, both she and her husband removed to Bethlehem, where the inheritance of their ancestors formerly lay. An express prophecy required, that the Saviour should be born there †, yet they had not contrived the journey, with any intent to fulfil the scripture: they were called thither by the command of the Roman Emperor, for the purpose of a general enrolment ‡. In that event we perceive and admire the over-ruling hand of God, who can accomplish his own designs by means the most improbable. It was so ordered, therefore, that, during their continuance in that town, Mary brought forth her child. And in what circumstances of meanness and distress! She had no friend to receive or attend her, and not only was obliged to solicit accommodations at an inn, but, while others obtained a preference, she was too poor and inconsiderable to gain admission into the house. She took up her abode in the stable, and there, without assistance or any comfortable conveniences, endured the pains of labour. But she was miraculously strengthened for the difficulties of her situation; insomuch that she herself performed the necessary offices

* Matt. i. 18—25. † Mic. v. 2. ‡ Luke ii. 1—7.

for

for her new-born Son: "she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger."

While we contemplate the situation of Mary, the mother of the Saviour, we learn never to look upon a state of indigence with contempt. Let not the great and opulent boast of the grandeur of their houses, furniture, or retinue; nor let the most necessitous complain of their mean accommodations. We perceive, that some of those, who have possessed the highest excellency of character, and whom God hath most honourably distinguished, were placed in obscurity, and often suffered the deepest distress. This should abase the pride of the rich, and draw forth thankfulness and praise from those, who are in the straits of poverty.

It should seem, that Mary was of a contemplative disposition. When she had received the account of the shepherds, to whom the nativity of Immanuel was announced by a messenger from heaven, she "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart *." And, while she endeavoured to derive spiritual improvement from an attentive regard to these extraordinary occurrences, doubtless her faith and hope, her gratitude and love, were enlivened and increased. Thus, also, it is incumbent upon us to treasure up in our minds the declarations of God's word, and the dispensations of his providence, which will furnish us with matter for devout and profitable meditation. Is this what we practise? Are we not strangers to religious retirement, examination, and recollection? And is it not owing to our levity and

* Luke ii. 19.

dissipation,

dissipation, that we make little or no advancement in divine knowledge and holy principles?

After forty days Mary appeared in the temple at Jerusalem, with her infant Son, desirous to yield a punctual compliance with all sacred institutions *. She came to present her first-born to the Lord, that he might be consecrated and redeemed; according to the express injunctions of the law †. She came, also, for her own purification, and offered the sacrifices appointed for that purpose; one, as a tribute of gratitude for safe delivery, and the other, as an acknowledgment of sinfulness. But so low was her rank in life, that she could make only such oblations, as were admitted in case of great poverty ‡. Let not an attention to the outward rites of religion be censured and condemned as superstition: it is indispensably requisite, and perfectly rational. But alas! our age is marked by its bold contempt of divine ordinances. "Will a man rob God?" This is indeed a robbery of the most audacious kind, yet not unfrequent. How many resist the express claims of Jehovah, and refuse the service which He requires! But let these arrogant despisers of the laws of the Almighty know, that he will reckon with them for presumptuously denying or withholding his just demands.

At the presentation of the infant Saviour in the temple, the aged Simeon delivered a remarkable prophecy. The pious mother and her husband stood with devout astonishment to hear the words, and re-

* Luke ii. 22—39. † Exod. xiii. 2. Numb. xviii. 15, 16.
‡ Lev. xii. 6—8.

ceive

ceive the benediction of that venerable saint. But Mary was warned, that her honour, in bearing so illustrious a Son, would be accompanied with painful trials, and her joy imbittered by a participation of his extreme afflictions. "A sword," said Simeon, "shall pierce through thy own soul." This, doubtless, was exactly fulfilled: so that, considering her tenderness of affection and quick sensibility, we may conclude that her relation to Jesus was the cause of inconceivable anguish to her mind. Such, in general, are all earthly advantages. They excite the envy of others, but produce very sharp distress to the possessors. O! be not anxious to obtain, and be afraid of valuing too highly, any temporal distinctions or enjoyments! That which is the object of your desires, may be as a sword to pierce your souls.

Mary's troubles soon commenced. She saw, indeed, the wise men from a distant country pay their adorations to the child upon her breast *, expressly acknowledging his high dignity. But she was immediately obliged to fly for his preservation. The tyrant Herod sought his destruction; and, to avoid his murderous jealousy, the holy family were directed by an Angel to retire into Egypt. So long and tedious a journey, in those circumstances of poverty and danger, must have been extremely painful. On this occasion, Mary stood in peculiar need of faith and patience. Egypt, however, the very country in which Israel had been oppressed, now offered a refuge and a hiding-place to Israel's Redeemer. In due time, the death of the

* Matt. ii. 11—23.

furious

furious perfecutor being announced, Mary, with her little houfhold, was conducted from Egypt, under the immediate care of Heaven, and again fettled at her own city Nazareth.

We, alfo, may be fituated in the midft of great perils, and, required to quit our accuftomed refidence, may feel the fevere pang of hitherto unknown diftrefs. But if we move in the path of duty, and go forth at the call of God, we may and fhould poffefs compofure and confidence of mind. The Lord himfelf will be our guide and defence. Like Mary, we may be banifhed from the ordinances and people of God; yet, even then, He can fupport and comfort us, and abundantly compenfate our lofs by the rich communications of his Spirit. Let us wait his time, and follow his directions. He will deliver us, and call us out of exile to our home.

Mary continued to dwell at Nazareth with Jofeph, in a mean and obfcure condition. But fuch was her piety, that neither the expenfe nor the fatigue of fo long a journey prevented her from attending the annual celebration of the paffover in Jerufalem *. At the age of twelve years Jefus accompanied his parents to that feftival: and on the conclufion of the facred folemnity they departed without their Son. They advanced to fome diftance on the road, before they were apprized of his abfence: they had fuppofed him to be with the reft of the company, amongft his relatives and acquaintance. On miffing him, however, they returned to the city to feek him: and on the third day,

* Luke ii. 41—51.

after

after a painful search, they found him in the temple, in conference with the chief public teachers of religion. His mother expostulated with him on his conduct; and such were his answers, that her mind was deeply impressed by his words; she did not clearly understand them, but "she kept them in her heart." Learn, you, who have the care of families, to bring them with you to the house of God. Possibly, you may there receive the most serious and solemn instructions, which you do not comprehend. Yet presume not to reject or despise them: like Mary, keep them in your heart, till, by meditation and prayer, you obtain the knowledge of their important meaning.

When Jesus entered on his ministry, it is probable that his mother usually accompanied him, and that her husband Joseph was then dead, as no further mention is made of him. Upon one occasion we find her, together with Jesus and his disciples, attending a marriage at Cana in Galilee *. Observing a deficiency of wine at the entertainment, she applied to her Son, having been a witness of his miracles in private, and expressed a wish, that he would exert his power to supply the want of the table. For that hasty proposal she met with a rebuke, though it was such, whatever the language may seem to us to import, as conveyed to the mother no mark of irreverence or disrespect. Jesus intimated, that it was not her part to dictate, at what time or in what manner his supernatural operations should be performed. But, if she had been rash in the suggestion, she discovered

* John ii. 1—11.

an

an amiable meeknefs in fubmitting to the reproof, and a ftrength of faith, likewife, in ftill encouraging the expectation, that he would provide for the neceffity.

We do not affert that fhe was a perfect character; and the incident, juft mentioned, as well as other confiderations, will ferve to fhew, the abfurdity and impiety of the Church of Rome. The members of that communion addrefs their prayers to the virgin, that fhe would interpofe her authority, and command her Son. If fhe was wrong in attempting to direct his works upon earth, it is prepofterous to imagine, that fhe fhould control the difpofal of his bleffings, now that he is exalted in glory. We rejoice, that we ftand in no need of her interceffion, fince we are allowed a free accefs to the Saviour himfelf. Without applying to any creature for an introduction, we may go to him immediately, and confidently look for a favourable reception.

When Jefus removed to Capernaum, Mary continued with him *. It fhould feem, while he was preaching in that town or neighbourhood, furrounded by a large audience, fhe and fome other of his near relations, apprehending danger, probably from the excefs of his zeal or the defigns of his enemies, wifhed to call him away from fuch a fituation †. Being informed of their defire to fpeak to him, he took the opportunity of declaring before the people, that he felt no ftronger attachment to his mother and brethren, merely as his natural kindred, than he did on a fpiritual account to all his faithful and obedient difciples.

* John ii. 12. † Matt. xii. 46—50.

ples. He meant not to ſlight ſo dear a parent, but to encourage and animate his followers by this lively expreſſion of regard.

Mary appears to have valued his inſtructions, on which ſhe conſtantly attended; and doubtleſs ſhe had the ſame need, which we ourſelves have, of his teaching and ſalvation. While, therefore, we obſerve her, like an humble ſcholar, ſitting at his feet, we ſhould learn not to deſpiſe the miniſtry of his word. None ſhould willingly abſent themſelves, whatever be their ſuperiority of wiſdom, or attainments in piety. Though we are not favoured with his perſonal preaching, yet his own inſtitutions are eſtabliſhed among us, and in them we may expect the divine preſence and bleſſing. O, why are we negligent, ſince the duty is indiſpenſably required, and the advantages, promiſed to every believing worſhipper, are great? Are we not deſirous to obtain the tokens of his affectionate regard, and to be accounted as his brother, his ſiſter, or his mother? We muſt remember, this high privilege is granted only to thoſe, who wait upon him with unfeigned ſincerity.

When our Lord celebrated his laſt paſſover at Jeruſalem, Mary was his attendant; and, probably, was witneſs to all the ignominious treatment and excruciating tortures, which he there endured. On many preceding occaſions, ſhe muſt have experienced the moſt pungent diſtreſs, perceiving him to be ſo generally "deſpiſed and rejected of men." But the view of his laſt ſufferings muſt have been painful beyond meaſure. She ſaw Him, of whom the Angel Gabriel

Gabriel had ſaid to her, "He ſhall reign over the houſe of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there ſhall be no end," bound as a priſoner, tried and condemned as an atrocious malefactor and impious blaſphemer, expoſed as a gazing-ſtock, to a profane mob, and nailed to the croſs, there to languiſh and expire amidſt the ſhouts and inſults of an immenſe multitude of all ranks. We know not, what her concluſions were; but then, doubtleſs, ſhe experienced the truth of Simeon's prophecy, and felt a ſword piercing her very ſoul. Yet, though her grief was extreme, we read not that ſhe ſtaggered through unbelief. At leaſt ſhe did not deſert the dying Saviour; nay, ſhe adhered to him at that ſeaſon, when it muſt have been dangerous to avow an attachment. She heard the taunts and clamours of his enemies, yet ſhe was found at the foot of the croſs *.

Some comfort, however, was adminiſtered to her in that tremendous ſcene of woe. The gracious Redeemer, amidſt all his pains, did not forget his bereaved mother. He looked upon her with the tendereſt affection, and, having no worldly property to leave, conſigned her to the care and protection of his beloved apoſtle. "Woman," ſaid he, "behold thy ſon:" from that time ſhe took up her abode with John, and, as if ſhe had been his own mother, was treated with all filial regard. The ſcriptures have related nothing further of her hiſtory, except that ſhe continued to aſſociate with the diſciples, after our Lord's aſcenſion, and joined in their exerciſes

* John xix. 25—27.

of devotion *. It is thought, that ſhe died in John's houſe at Epheſus, and it has been believed by ſome, that ſhe ſuffered martyrdom for the faith of Jeſus. But theſe, and other traditional accounts, are not to be depended on.

Of this there cannot remain a doubt, that ſhe poſſeſſed an eminent degree of grace, and that, after enduring much for Him, who was her honoured Lord and Saviour as well as her dear Son, her ſoul was received up to his preſence in heaven. There ſhe now beholds his glory, in a brighter manner than ſhe could have done upon earth, and there ſhe will reign with him for ever. Yet to that bliſsful inheritance ſhe is admitted, not as being the mother of Jeſus, but on the very ſame grounds as the whole Church of God; being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt. She will there rejoice in her ſpiritual union with Chriſt, more than in her natural relation to him, and eſteem it a higher privilege to have known him by faith, than to have brought him forth into the world.

But, while we ſee that Mary was not aſhamed or afraid to ſtand by the croſs, let us enquire, Are we bold and ſtedfaſt in the cauſe of Jeſus? Are we willing to hazard every thing for him? If we can indeed reſign ourſelves and our all to his diſpoſal, he will provide for our temporal ſupport, as he did for that of Mary. But ah! how few will profeſs an attachment to him, when it is likely to ſubject them to difficulties and dangers! We mourn for the

* Acts i. 14.

cowardice

cowardice and treachery of the thousands, who desert his service; and we warn all, who are called by his name, that, if they will not suffer with him, they shall not reign with him, and that, if they deny him, he also will deny them *.

There are those, perhaps, who express their admiration of the honour conferred upon the holy virgin, and say, as a certain woman did to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb, that bare thee, and the paps, which thou hast sucked †!" We would remind them of our Lord's reply upon that occasion, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." To you, then, who hear his word, we propose the question, Do you keep it? Does it excite your serious attention, or retain a place in your remembrance? What is the value you put upon it; or the influence, which it produces? Does it regulate your practice, as well as enliven your hopes? Had not such been its effects with Mary, her case would have been wretched and desperate, notwithstanding all she had done or suffered for the Saviour.

It is far better, therefore, to possess a spiritual knowledge of Christ, and an obedient regard to him, than to stand the foremost among his natural kindred. You, who have believed in his name, are become the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, and shortly will be admitted into the presence of Jesus, where you shall enjoy more delightful intercourse with him, than ever was, or could be, vouchsafed to his holy mother

* 2 Tim. ii. 12. † Luke xi. 27, 28.

upon earth. O rejoice, and give thanks for the distinguished honour, to which you are called! Determine, with Saint Paul, to "know no man after the flesh," and never more to boast of any worldly connections. Nay, if you could claim a relation to the Saviour himself, you should place no dependence upon it *, but pray, that, being joined to him by his Spirit, you may now be conformed to his image, and finally "behold his face in righteousness."

Amen.

* 2 Cor. v. 16.

JUDAS

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

CHAP. IV.

Judas, appointed an apoſtle—diſhoneſt—cenſured Mary for waſte of ointment—warned by Jeſus—betrayed him for money—deſtroyed himſelf.

HAVING concluded the hiſtory of the Saviour, we may pay a more minute attention to ſome of his chief companions. Twelve perſons were ſelected to be his intimate aſſociates, and the partakers of his counſels, and were alſo by a peculiar deſignation, diſtinct from the choice of friendſhip, appointed to ſuſtain the high and important function of Apoſtles. All theſe were upright, and eminent in holineſs, excepting one: an indelible mark of infamy is left upon the name of Judas Iſcariot. The eleven others had their failings, but Judas poſſeſſed nothing truly good: he was vitious throughout, unſound from firſt to laſt, a finiſhed hypocrite, who, under the cloke of religion, concealed the baſeſt principles. Though a follower, a preacher, and an Apoſtle of Chriſt, he felt no ſincere regard for him, but ſought only to make gain of godlineſs.

This is a tremendous ſubject, and ought to excite great ſearchings of heart. The character before us ſtands as an awful admonition, not to truſt in any

favourable appearances or reputation for ſanctity. Even in a ſacred function, with admired gifts, and acknowledged uſefulneſs, we may act as traitors to the cauſe of Chriſt, and finally periſh. Sooner or later the diſſembler with God will be detected, and receive his juſt reward. "Every plant, which our heavenly Father hath not planted, ſhall be rooted up *." Thus alſo the Saviour declares, "Many will ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have caſt out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity †." Let us judge ourſelves; and ſurrender up our whole hearts to God, "without partiality and without hypocriſy." So ſhall we be preſerved from the fatal apoſtaſy of Judas.

Though the particulars, which are recorded of his life, are few, yet the diſtinguiſhing features of it are clearly drawn. From the beginning he ſeems to have been under the influence of that baſe principle, "the love of money." Probably, he aſſumed a religious profeſſion from ſecular views. He might be ſtruck with the miracles of Jeſus, and led to expect conſiderable advantage from the ſervice of a Maſter, who had all nature at his command. Or, ſuppoſing that our Lord was about to erect a temporal dominion, he might indulge the hope of obtaining a large ſhare in its honours and emoluments. A poor and ſordid motive this, for pretending a regard to the Goſpel!

* Matt. xv. 13. † vii. 22, 23.

Judas was intrusted with the ministry of the word, and appointed to be an Apostle, by Christ himself. Nay, he appears to have received as full and extensive a commission, as the other eleven, and to have been furnished with the same miraculous powers *. According to his charge, he went forth to preach the kingdom of God from town to town, and testified of that salvation, which he understood not for himself. He healed all manner of sickness, without any principle of benevolence, and even cast out devils, while he himself remained the slave of Satan.

In the designation of Judas to this sacred office, our Lord was not imposed on. He well understood what were the miscreant's motives and purposes, and foresaw the whole of his future conduct. It may, indeed, seem a wonder, that the searcher of all hearts should choose a known traitor. We confess, those are most awful dispensations, by which hypocrites and persons of base character are brought forward to minister in holy things, and possess power in the Church. Yet these cases every where occur, and the Lord does not prevent them; nay, he so orders things in his providence, that they must infallibly take place. He does not influence any man to do wickedly; but, though he continueth holy, he is pleased to allow sinners full opportunity for pursuing and accomplishing their own plans. Thus he dealt with Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and thus he deals with many, who are of the worst disposition, at this very time. He raises them to situations, in which they are capable of doing extensive

* Matt. x. 4. Mar. iii. 19. Luke vi. 16.

miſchief, diſgracing, oppoſing, or corrupting the Goſpel, which they profeſs to patroniſe or preach. Yet wiſe ends are anſwered: the extreme depravity of human nature is more clearly demonſtrated, the faith and patience of the ſaints are tried and improved, and God himſelf manifeſts both his forbearance and his juſtice.

Jeſus and his diſciples, in their various removals, had one common ſtock for their ſupport. This money was committed to Judas: he carried the bag, which contained chiefly the charitable contributions of others, who miniſtered unto them. He was intruſted with the ſecular affairs of this little houſhold, and bought their proviſions. It was not much which they poſſeſſed; yet Judas took care to embezzle ſomething for himſelf. Probably, he had ſought and obtained the office, with a view of practiſing his diſhoneſty.

Out of their ſmall fund, it ſhould ſeem, a part was deſigned for the poor. But Judas made his advantage of the kind intentions of his Maſter: while he was ready to ſecond every propoſal of relieving the neceſſitous, he contrived to appropriate the alms to his own uſe. Juſt before the laſt paſſover, when Mary, Lazarus's ſiſter, out of the warmth of her regard, anointed the feet of her dear Lord with coſtly perfumes, Judas raiſed the objection, and complained with the greateſt vehemence, "Why was not this ointment ſold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor*?" We might have concluded, that he was a

* John xii. 1—3. xiii. 29.

man

man of extreme tenderneſs and liberality: but this was a baſe pretence. He felt not for the miſeries of his fellow-creatures; he wiſhed only for the opportunity of ſecuring to himſelf the three hundred pence.

Hypocrites are generally cenſorious, and forward to condemn the fervour of zeal as extravagance. Many, likewiſe, gratify their own penurious diſpoſition, while they allege their intentions of making a reſerve for charitable purpoſes. They would be thought compaſſionate and kind, and yet they chiefly conſult, how they ſhall enrich themſelves. Alas! with a heart enſlaved to covetouſneſs, it is difficult to be ſtrictly honeſt. The ſtrongeſt barriers are inſufficient to reſtrain ſuch a temper; and hence it is, that the moſt ſacred truſts are frequently betrayed. Men break through every ſolemn obligation, in order to obtain a paltry ſum: and they hoard up gold and ſilver, "the ruſt of which ſhall be a witneſs againſt them, and ſhall eat their fleſh, as it were fire *."

Let not that, therefore, be cenſured as a ſinful or needleſs expenſe, which is laid out in the cauſe of Chriſt, and from love to his name. We plead not for waſte or profuſion, but, on the contrary, inculcate frugality, with the view of promoting a more enlarged benevolence. Let not charity, however, be a mere pretence: it ſhould appear in liberal exertions. There is a ſenſe, in which we may ſay to every individual among us, You are intruſted with your Lord's money. Preſume not to ſpend the whole upon yourſelves, nor yet refuſe to apply it to the proper uſes.

* James v. 3.

Remember

Remember the interpretation, which the diſciples put on their Maſter's injunction to Judas. Their miſtake was an acknowledgment of his uſual practice, and of the mercy, in which he delighted. They thought that he bad the keeper of their treaſure "give ſomething to the poor *." Ah! in how many ways may you prove unfaithful ſtewards! Though you deteſt robbery, yet are there no juſt claims, which you withhold? Or do you not reſemble the traitor, by acting from motives in ſecret, far other than thoſe which you profeſs before the world?

Judas, probably, practiſed much caution and reſerve in his behaviour, that he might conceal his real character. One ſin may prevent or counteract another. A covetous man, merely through parſimony, abſtains from that kind of ſenſuality, which is expenſive; and a hypocrite, through fear of detection, ſtudies to avoid open and groſs immoralities. Such an one muſt throw off the maſk, before he can aſſociate with the profligate and profane. To maintain his reputation for ſanctity, he will conform to many religious obſervances, which he diſlikes, and put himſelf under painful reſtraints. In this reſpect Judas acted his part ſo well, that he eſcaped the ſuſpicion of his brethren the Apoſtles. Alas! we apprehend, that ſome among ourſelves may aſſume and retain the garb of piety, with no better diſpoſitions. Yet we allow, that we are not warranted in drawing any unfavourable concluſions againſt individuals, in whom we do not perceive any glaring incon-

* John xiii. 29.

ſiſtency

ſiſtency of conduct. Nay, we ſhould cheriſh the moſt charitable hopes of each other, as far and as long as we can. But though there may be much inſincerity, which is not diſcovered among men, "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him, with whom we have to do *."

Our Lord, being perfectly aware of the character of Judas, more than once deſcribed his caſe, reproved him for his baſe deſigns, and warned him of his danger. This very circumſtance aggravates his guilt; as he ſinned not in ignorance, but againſt ſolemn admonitions. When many diſciples withdrew, and it ſeemed dubious whether even the Apoſtles would remain, Jeſus exclaimed, "Have not I choſen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" And this, the Evangeliſt obſerves, he ſpake of Judas Iſcariot, who had then, probably, formed the ſcheme of betraying his Maſter †.

At the laſt ſupper, when Jeſus waſhed the feet of his diſciples, he declared in the hearing of them all, that there was one of unſound character in their company: "Ye are clean," ſaid he, "but not all: for he knew who ſhould betray him ‡." And again he affirmed, "I ſpeak not of you all; I know whom I have choſen: but that the ſcripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me, hath lift up his heel againſt me." Then, with expreſſions of deep diſtreſs, he repeated the warning, that there was treachery among them, and that he ſhould ſoon be delivered to his enemies through the baſe perfidy of one, who ſat with him at the

* Heb. iv. 13. † John vi. 70, 71. ‡ xiii. 10, 11, 18.

 table.

table *. His information became ſtill more particular, and his reference to Judas too clear to be doubted. At the ſame time, he added a tremendous denunciation of divine vengeance againſt the wretch, who ſhould dare to perpetrate ſo horrible a crime.

Judas was not ignorant from the firſt, that he was the perſon meant; for the diabolical plan had been previouſly laid, and he waited only for an opportunity to carry it into effect. But did not his Lord's admonitions terrify and confound him? Did they not, at leaſt, divert him from his purpoſe? Could he be ſo obdurate, as to perſiſt in his reſolution, and, with his eyes open, ruſh on to everlaſting deſtruction? Ah! what deſperate hardneſs of heart; what extreme madneſs was here! The traitor, as if he were unmoved, and unconſcious of thoſe deſigns which were imputed to him, dared to aſk, "Maſter, is it I?" and though Jeſus immediately replied, that he was the man, yet even this, it ſhould ſeem, produced no alteration.

His impious effrontery will appear the more aſtoniſhing, if we allow, what is highly probable, that Judas, as well as the reſt, partook of the Euchariſt, or the ſolemn ordinance of the Lord's ſupper †. Being aware, however, of the extent of human depravity, we ceaſe to wonder at human guilt, but not at the forbearance of our God, who could ſuffer one of ſo abandoned a diſpoſition to trifle with and profane his moſt ſacred inſtitutions. Similar caſes, indeed, occur among

* Matt. xxvi. 20—29. Mar. xiv. 17—25. Luke xxii. 14—23. John xiii. 21—26.

† See Luke xxii. 20, 21.

ourſelves:

ourſelves: nor can they be entirely prevented by any exertions of eccleſiaſtical diſcipline. The Lord, probably, permits hypocrites to proceed to ſuch lengths, for the diſplay of his own juſtice in the final iſſue. With hearts full of all unrighteouſneſs, they may frequent his houſe and table: but at laſt they will have to render an awful account of theſe their religious performances, and "receive the greater damnation *."

If they be plainly warned by their friends or miniſters, this, alſo, will aggravate their guilt, and conſtitute a heavy charge againſt them at the day of judgment. O that they would liſten to the repreſentations and entreaties of their faithful monitors; that they would pauſe, and conſider the event, and not perſevere in defiance of everlaſting perdition! It is a favourable ſign, when men examine themſelves, and pray earneſtly to be delivered from all duplicity of mind and perfidious conduct. Then are they leaſt likely to ſin or to periſh as the traitor did.

Our Lord having frequently declared the approach of his own death, Judas probably began to fear, that all his ſchemes and expectations of worldly advancement would be defeated, and wiſhed to obtain the beſt compenſation poſſible for his diſappointment. The infamous wretch, therefore, entered into a contract with the Jewiſh rulers, to betray his Maſter into their hands for a trifling ſum; and from that time he ſought an opportunity of doing it in a private manner †. It is ſaid, that he was inſtigated by

* Matt. xxiii. 14. † Matt. xxvi. 14—16. Mar. xiv. 10, 11. Luke xxii. 3—6.

the Devil; but this is not to be conſidered as any excuſe. Satan, doubtleſs, takes advantage of our evil inclinations; and he may be permitted to aſſiſt us in contriving and executing our projects: yet the guilt is entirely our own. As it was Judas's plan and deſire to procure money, Satan ſuggeſted this method of gratifying his wiſhes, and continued to urge him to it, till the iniquitous purpoſe was accompliſhed.

After the ſolemn admonitions of Chriſt, Judas, inſtead of relenting, gave himſelf up, without reſerve, to the influence of the accurſed fiend; and, perhaps indignant on being ſuſpected and diſcovered, he proceeded immediately to perpetrate his baſe deſign *. According to the plot, which had been laid, he conſented to conduct an armed band of ruffians, in order to apprehend his Maſter †. He knew the garden, where Jeſus had been accuſtomed to retire for devotion, and where he himſelf, probably, had frequently joined with him in prayer. O how different the end, for which he now repaired to Gethſemane! He undertook to be a guide and aſſiſtant to thoſe, who were filled with murderous rage againſt his Lord. With this intent he went up to Jeſus, and, pretending reverence and love, ſaluted him. The kiſs was the appointed ſignal for ſeizing his perſon: and thus, by the aid of a perfidious Apoſtle, the Saviour was betrayed into the hands of wicked men to be crucified and ſlain.

* John xiii. 27—30. † Matt. xxvi. 47—50. Mar. xiv. 43—46. Luke xxii. 47—54. John xviii. 2—12.

We

We view the tranſaction with amazement and horror. The ſin of the traitor is marked with peculiar aggravations. We are ready to aſk, Is this the treatment, which the benevolent and holy Jeſus deſerved? Or ſhall we wonder at the oppoſition of the ignorant and openly profane, when one of his moſt intimate aſſociates riſes up againſt him? Do not the former profeſſions of Judas, and the ſacred function he ſuſtained, render his conduct the more deteſtable? Can we conceive a more conſummate hypocrite, or a baſer act of treachery? How pungent the reproof, addreſſed to him, "Betrayeſt thou the Son of man with a kiſs?" Convinced as thou art of his high character, how canſt thou favour the deſigns of his enemies? Or why doſt thou aſſume the maſk of friendſhip, in order to practiſe thy villany? What is the advantage propoſed? Is Jeſus to be bartered away for thirty pieces of ſilver, the price of a common ſlave? And is eternal life to be given up for ſo mean a conſideration?

There are many ways, in which we ourſelves may act the ſame diabolical part. While we pretend a high regard for Chriſt, we may expoſe his cauſe to contempt, imbolden blaſphemers to vent their impiety, and even teach them to do it with ſucceſs. But has he merited ſuch a return for all his kindneſs? Or, ſhall we ſo inſult him, as to cry, "Hail, Maſter," at the very time when we entertain the baſeſt intentions againſt him? What have we found in his decided adverſaries, which ſhould induce us to eſpouſe and promote their intereſts? Are theſe the men, with

with whom we would aſſociate, and whoſe hands we would ſtrengthen? Can we, then, prove, that our former profeſſed principles are falſe, or that Jeſus will not make good his engagements? Or what emolument do we expect from the oppoſite party? Alas! it is not poſſible, that they ſhould offer any equivalent, any proper compenſation for the immenſe loſs, we ſhall incur by our perfidy.

Judas, perhaps, conſidered not what would follow. He might imagine, that his Maſter would eſcape out of the hands of his enemies, as he had done before. But be that as it may, when he ſaw him condemned, and about to be nailed to the croſs, his conſcience was alarmed, and he felt inexpreſſible horror for the atrocious deed which he had committed *. Ah! what would he then have given, to have revoked his bargain? What comfort did he receive from the thirty pieces of ſilver, the wages of his unrighteouſneſs? He could not bear to retain the money in his poſſeſſion, but immediately reſtored it to the Jewiſh rulers, declaring his heinous guilt, and the anguiſh of his ſoul, for delivering up an innocent perſon to fall by their violence.

And did not thoſe furious perſecutors relent, when they heard ſo ſtriking a confeſſion? Did they not tremble for themſelves, and endeavour to reſcue the holy ſufferer? No: they remained obdurate. But the traitor, unable to ſupport himſelf under the convictions and terrors of his mind, caſt down before them the bribe which he had accepted, and inſtantly

* Matt. xxvii. 3—10.

fled

fled away, that he might put an end to his wretched life. "He went and hanged himſelf." Probably, the place, which he choſe for his own execution, was on a precipice, and the rope, by which he was ſuſpended, failed: for "falling headlong, he burſt aſunder in the midſt, and all his bowels guſhed out *." In this plight he lay a miſerable ſpectacle to the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and, as the fact excited general notice, a public monument of God's vengeance.

What an ignominious and lamentable death for a follower and an Apoſtle of Chriſt! How fooliſh, as well as wicked, the expedient, by which he attempted to releaſe himſelf from the anguiſh of his mind! He went "to his own place †," the place, for which alone he was fitted by his diſpoſition and conduct, where his accuſing conſcience will continue to torment him with inconceivably great and uninterrupted horrors, and where he will be exhibited as an example of divine juſtice for ever. "It had been good for that man, if he had not been born."

But is it not ſaid, that he repented? Yes; on ſome accounts he was ſorry for what he had done. Shocked with the dread of conſequences, he made confeſſion of his guilt, and reſtored his impious gain. But he poſſeſſed not that "godly ſorrow," which "worketh repentance to ſalvation not to be repented of ‡." He diſcovered no proper humiliation; he offered up no petition for mercy. Under extreme miſery, his heart remained full of vile affections and rebellion againſt God: and this will be the caſe of every one, who

* Acts i. 18, 19. † i. 25. ‡ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

"suffers the vengeance of eternal fire." The manner of his death proved, that he was not a penitent: he died in the actual commission of sin, and of that sin, which, from its nature, excludes repentance. He died as a murderer; "and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him *."

From such a precedent, will any undertake to plead for suicide? We observe, that Satan generally tempts men, who are a burden and terror to themselves, to seek relief by this expedient. We therefore warn them to consider, whither it will lead. You wish to fly from present pain; but you are rushing into that, which is infinitely more intolerable and eternal. This the Devil tries to conceal, or persuades you to disbelieve, till your ruin be unavoidable and remediless. O listen not to his suggestions; for "he is a liar!" O lift not up against yourselves the hand of violence, which would render your salvation impossible! Cry to God with incessant importunity, that he would extend his mercy, and communicate peace to your souls. Though you fear it is too late, we would encourage your application: many, whose cases seemed as desperate as your's, have obtained forgiveness and comfort. Only consent to make the trial, and wait upon the Lord. At any rate, dare not to meditate your own destruction: surely it will be soon enough to enter upon a state of never-ending torment, when God himself shall give you the summons.

That we may be impressed with an abhorrence of departing from the faith, let us contemplate, more

* 1 John iii. 15.

minutely, the tremendous consequences of the apostasy of Judas.

1. He involved the faithful disciples of Jesus in deep distress. Those, who had been attached to the Gospel, would be ready to suspect the truth of their own principles, when they observed a zealous preacher totally renounce them, and even sell his master to his enemies, "for filthy lucre's sake." This circumstance, probably, staggered the Apostles themselves, and increased their confusion, when they all forsook their Lord. You, who love the Saviour, cannot but grieve for such instances as this, more than for any temporal calamities. You lament, that the Saviour is "wounded in the house of his friends." You bewail the persons, who thus "draw back unto perdition," and in whom all your fond hopes are disappointed. You are ready to fear, that the work of God will come to nought, and "the armies of the aliens" prevail. Perhaps, you tremble under an apprehension, that you yourselves, also, in some evil hour of temptation, shall "fall after the same example of unbelief." But we entreat you to compose your minds. God will plead his own cause, and vindicate his honour. He is faithful, and therefore you are secure in his Covenant. He will not suffer any real believer to depart and perish, as Judas did. These cases, we allow, are painful, but they ought not to shake your firmness or your hopes. We are forewarned of them in the scriptures: even the treachery of Judas was no other than a completion of several express predictions. "It must needs be, that

offences come; but wo to that man, by whom the offence cometh *."

2. He afforded the enemies of Jeſus cauſe of triumph. Long had they repreſented the Saviour as a deceiver; and, probably, they were confirmed in that opinion by the conduct of Judas. It might then be aſſerted, with ſome plauſibility, that the cheat was diſcovered, ſince one of the preachers of this new religion had forſaken it, and come over to their intereſt. Thus it is now. Apoſtates bring the Goſpel into contempt, and increaſe the prejudice and obduracy of infidels. The Lord, in righteous judgment, permits ſuch occurrences, as furniſh men with a pretext for oppoſing that truth, which they hate. They exclaim, therefore, "The whole ſyſtem is a deluſion: there can be no real value, at leaſt, in thoſe principles, which ſo many, after long trial, have renounced. It ſhould ſeem, that the moſt zealous advocates for the faith are all actuated by ſiniſter motives, ſince ſome of their company have betrayed their unſoundneſs: we may judge of the reſt from theſe ſpecimens."

Will you hear, what may be ſaid in reply? Aſk thoſe very perſons, who have deſerted Chriſtianity, aſk them ſeriouſly, Who are in the right? In general, they are conſtrained to bear a deciſive teſtimony in favour of that religion, which they have relinquiſhed, and to condemn themſelves. This Judas did. Many, alſo, like him, have ſhewn the greateſt horrors for their ſin, and periſhed miſerably. Their caſe,

* Matt. xviii. 7.

therefore,

therefore, loudly proclaims the folly and madneſs of forſaking the ways of God. That ſome, that numbers of thoſe, who profeſs the faith, have never felt its influence, we confeſs and lament. But ſtill "the foundation of God ſtandeth ſure." If, indeed, it be fair to judge of a whole ſociety from certain individuals, there is no ſuch thing as ſincerity in the world. Then all the Apoſtles were vile impoſtors; and Judas acted the moſt honeſt part, when he threw off the maſk. But this, we ſuppoſe, no one will venture to aſſert. Such a declaration would be an inſult to the common ſenſe of mankind.

Let us view the apoſtate once more, and obſerve

3. He brought upon himſelf aggravated miſery and ruin. We have ſeen, that he received no comfort from the money, which he ſo eagerly deſired, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath *:" when procured by unrighteouſneſs, they frequently fill the minds of their poſſeſſors, even in this life, with anguiſh and diſmay. Thus, alſo, St. Paul teſtified, "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while ſome coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows †." In various ways God can afflict and puniſh ſinners, while he ſuffers them to accompliſh their wiſhes. He can render them ſo much a terror to themſelves, that they ſhall "chooſe ſtrangling, and death rather than life ‡." But the moſt tremendous diſplay of his juſtice, in the perdition of ungodly men, is reſerved for another world, where they ſhall

* Prov. xi. 4. † 1 Tim. vi. 10. ‡ Job vii. 15.

receive, in exact proportion, "according to their works." There shall every vile apostate, as well as the traitor Judas, be distinguished by peculiar marks of indignation; for no guilt can be so heinous as their's.

Do not these considerations alarm our fears? Then let us watch and pray: and especially let us beware of those snares, by which others have fallen. Let us be serious and upright, renouncing every carnal motive in our transactions with God. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways *." But, taking hold of the Covenant in Jesus Christ, and aiming at the divine glory with singleness of eye, we shall persevere in righteousness, and be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation †." Amen.

* James i. 8. † 1 Pet. i. 5.

SAINT

SAINT PETER.

CHAP. V.

SECT. I.

Peter, a fisherman, brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew—took a miraculous draught of fishes—was appointed an Apostle—walked on the sea—confessed Christ—one of his most favourite and zealous attendants—was warned at the last supper—slept in Gethsemane—defended his Master—forsook and denied him—repented—had an interview with Jesus after the resurrection.

A GREAT variety of natural dispositions appears even among those, who possess the grace of God. Each man's peculiar temper gives a cast to his religious conduct, and, while it distinguishes him from others, exposes him to peculiar snares and temptations. Those of lively affections are apt to be unguarded and precipitate, and frequently offend through indiscreet and unseasonable exertions of zeal. But the calm and sedate, however they may deliberate and judge wisely, often want the fervour, courage, and activity, which are necessary for difficult undertakings and extensive usefulness.

The history, now proposed to our consideration, will evince the propriety of these remarks. Of all

the perſons, who accompanied our Lord, none appears more conſpicuous than Saint Peter. He has been ſtyled the prince of the Apoſtles, and not improperly, for he generally ſtood forth as their leader in every tranſaction. The excellence of his character, to which Jeſus himſelf gave the ſtrongeſt atteſtations, demands our eſteem. We muſt admire his warm attachment to his Maſter, his fidelity, fortitude, and vigour. Yet we allow that he had failings, and on one melancholy occaſion was betrayed into very diſhonourable conduct. He was naturally ſanguine, bold, and confident; and, through the influence of this his prevailing temper, he ſometimes appeared forward, raſh, and preſumptuous. We do not attempt to juſtify or palliate the faults of pious perſons; but we ought not to be vehement in our cenſures. Let not the careleſs and the indolent, who loudly condemn the imprudence of ſome lively Chriſtians, flatter themſelves that their caution and inactivity are more pleaſing to God, than the honeſt warmth of thoſe, who, like Peter, may occaſionally over-act their part. The latter may be often wrong, but the former, being deſtitute of love and zeal, are never right. It is incumbent upon us to regard the Saviour, not with indifference, but with fervency of affection, and on every ſuitable opportunity to exert all our abilities for promoting his glory.

Peter was an inhabitant of Bethſaida in Galilee, where, though Jeſus preached often and performed many miracles, the Goſpel was generally rejected. Here he carried on the mean and laborious occupation

tion of a fisherman, for which the place was conveniently situated. His low rank and education, perhaps, rendered him insignificant, if not contemptible, in the eyes of the world, but he obtained favour with God, and an honourable distinction in the Church. The Lord seeth not as man seeth: He often passes by the great, the noble, and the learned, and, to accomplish his purposes, selects such instruments, as are thought weak and unfit for the work. He chooses an Apostle for the publication of his rich mercy, not from the courtiers of the Roman Emperor, or the philosophers of Athens, but from the poor fishermen of Bethsaida. By such a dispensation He exhibits both his power and his grace, and gives a public declaration, "that no flesh should glory in his presence."

Peter was the brother of Andrew, and probably, like him, had been a disciple of John the Baptist, before his acquaintance with Jesus *. Andrew no sooner obtained the knowledge of the Saviour, than he conducted Peter to him. How many have reason to thank God for their pious friends, whose conversation, instructions, and exhortations have brought them into the way of peace and righteousness! Let us look with compassion on the souls of our associates and relatives, recommend the Gospel of Christ to their acceptance, and labour assiduously for their spiritual welfare. Jesus received the new convert with kindness, and shewed by his address that he was not ignorant of him though a stranger. He also intimated a design of taking him into his service, by giving him a new name, expres-

* John i. 40—42.

sive

ſive of peculiar firmneſs and ſteadfaſtneſs. He ſaid, "Thou art Simon," (ſuch being his former appellation) "the ſon of Jona: thou ſhalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a ſtone," or "a rock." We, with the ancient church, have adopted the name of PETER, whoſe ſignification is the ſame with that of Cephas, and which was the term uſed to explain it.

It is probable, that St. Peter continued with our Lord for ſome time, and then, returning for a ſeaſon to his old employment, dwelt at Capernaum. There we find that Jeſus went into his houſe, and miraculouſly healed his wife's mother of a fever *. There, alſo, Jeſus met with him following his occupation, entered into his ſhip, and directed him to caſt his net into the ſea †. He had laboured all the night without ſucceſs; but now, at one draught, he took an immenſe quantity of fiſhes. This was evidently deſigned as an omen for good, and an encouragement to venture upon his Maſter's ſervice with the greater confidence. The fact ſo plainly aſcertained the dignity of the Saviour, that Peter was overwhelmed with reverential awe, knowing himſelf unworthy to ſtand before this holy and exalted Perſonage. With the deepeſt ſelf-abaſement, occaſioned by an impreſſive conviction of guilt, he cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a ſinful man, O Lord." If we have formed proper conceptions of the divine purity, we ſhall not wonder at the fear and confuſion here expreſſed. The moſt excellent men have, in like manner, confeſſed themſelves unfit to appear in the pre-

* Luke iv. 31, 38. 39. † v. 1—11.

ſence

rence of God, and, when favoured with his nearest approaches and clearest revelations, have declared the strongest abhorrence of themselves.

But Jesus immediately replied with words of comfort to his trembling servant, and reminded him, that he must prepare for nobler employment, and from that time be occupied with remarkable success in catching men. The call went to his heart with irresistible energy: he did not then want any further inducement to become a stated follower of his Lord. Every worldly consideration gave way to higher motives: "he forsook all," his fishes, nets, vessels, friends, and relations, that he might devote himself to the work of the ministry.

Soon afterwards he was appointed to the Apostolic office, and sent out, with eleven others, to preach the Gospel, and confirm its doctrines by miraculous operations *. Whenever the twelve are enumerated in the New Testament, Peter's name stands in the front. He was among the first, who were taken into Christ's service, and always distinguished himself by his zeal and activity. But, though we allow a peculiar excellency in his character, we cannot favour the conclusion, that he possessed authority over the rest. There is no appearance in the sacred history of any such supremacy or infallibility, as the Church of Rome ascribes to him. No superiority of this kind was ever granted by the Saviour, demanded by Peter, or acknowledged by his brethren †. The arrogant

* Matt. x. 2. Luke vi. 13, 14. † Matt. xxiii. 8—12. Acts xv. 13, &c. 2 Cor. xii. 11. Gal. ii. 11.

claims,

claims, therefore, of those who call themselves his successors, the Bishops of Rome, are absurd and impious. They have no foundation in the scriptures, and produce very mischievous effects. But, waving the consideration of those errors, we should pray that all the preachers of the Gospel may obtain a measure of the same grace, and manifest the same holy principles, by which St. Peter was influenced. So shall no respect to their interest, reputation, or connections in life prevent them from promoting, to the uttermost, the cause of Christ and the enlargement of his kingdom.

We observe Peter's constant attachment to his Master, and readiness to profess that regard. On one occasion, when he saw Jesus walking upon the tempestuous sea in the night, at first he was intimidated, as well as his companions; but afterward, hearing the gracious voice of his Lord, he cried out, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water *." This address, evidently, proceeded from faith and love, and yet betrayed much forwardness and self-confidence. To check these wrong principles, by giving him a painful proof of his weakness, which he was little aware of, Jesus permitted him to venture upon the deep.

We behold Peter, then, upheld by a divine power, treading on the boisterous waves, as on dry ground. But at length, when he attended to the violence of the wind, not retaining, as he should have done, his dependence on the Lord, his courage drooped, and his body began to sink. He expected nothing but imme-

* Matt. xiv. 22—33.

diate

diate deſtruction, and exclaimed in great anguiſh, "Lord, ſave me." This occurrence, which was an awful preſage of what he afterwards experienced, ſhould have taught him more diffidence and meekneſs of ſpirit. Jeſus immediately afforded him the neceſſary aſſiſtance, caught him as he was on the point of being overwhelmed, and conducted him ſafely to the ſhip. At the ſame time he ſharply reproved him for his unbelief, through which his attempt had failed: "O! thou of little faith, wherefore didſt thou doubt?" Alas! how often have we been fruſtrated in our good deſigns, on the very ſame account! For a ſeaſon, perhaps, we ſeemed as if we could truſt the Lord; but, when we took off our eye from him, and thought of our dangerous ſituation, our fears prevailed, and, if Jeſus had not reſcued us, we muſt have utterly periſhed.

On another occaſion, when many diſciples forſook the Saviour, and the Apoſtles themſelves appeared ready to depart, Peter, with his uſual fervour, profeſſed his firm regard and unſhaken reſolution not to deſert his Maſter *. "Lord," ſaid he, "to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life; and we believe, and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God." This was indeed an evidence of the ſincerity of his faith, and the warmth of his affection. With ſuch views of the Saviour, we alſo ſhall adhere to him, and abhor the propoſal of ſeeking any other refuge. If our ſouls are eſtabliſhed in a full perſuaſion, that he alone can give us peace and everlaſting

* John vi. 66—69.

happineſs, then we ſhall be willing to perſevere through every difficulty and danger in his ſervice.

Jeſus enquiring of his diſciples, what opinions were formed concerning him, St. Peter ſtood forth, and made that noble confeſſion, "Thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God *." His Maſter, in reply, pronounced him truly bleſſed, as having obtained this clear knowledge and ſtrong confidence, not by any peculiar diſcernment of his own, or information from others, not by any human abilities or aſſiſtance, but by the diſtinguiſhing grace of God and illumination of his Spirit. Jeſus added, in very remarkable terms, that Peter, as his ſignificant name implied, ſhould be uſed as a "Rock," that on him, as one of its main ſupports, ſhould be built the glorious edifice of the Church, and that, however oppoſed by Satan and his agents, it ſhould continue to riſe, and ſtand firm and impregnable againſt the moſt violent aſſaults †. He declared further, that he ſhould

* Matt. xvi. 13—19.

† Some ſuppoſe, that Jeſus intended to point out himſelf as the Rock; and it is allowed, that He is the only ſure foundation, on which his Church can reſt, 1 Cor. iii. 11. Others underſtand, that the confeſſion of faith, which St. Peter here made, is the Rock referred to, ſince the proſperity and even the exiſtence of the Church depend on the doctrines, included in that confeſſion. But the connection of the paſſage does not ſeem to be well preſerved by either of thoſe ſenſes; and the Author conceives, that there is no more impropriety in conſidering Peter as a ſupport of the Church, than in repreſenting the Apoſtles and Prophets as the foundation, on which it is built, Eph. ii. 20. Rev. xxi. 14. Such an interpretation derogates not from the honour of Chriſt; nor can it favour the popiſh notion of Peter's ſupremacy.

appoint this favoured Apoſtle to be a principal officer in the kingdom of grace, and deliver its keys into his hands, as an emblem of authority committed to him for the adminiſtration of its affairs. But, with whatever powers Peter was inveſted, he poſſeſſed them only in common with his brethren, as they alſo afterwards received a commiſſion of the ſame extent *. On no ground can the tyrannical uſurpations of the Popes of Rome be juſtified, from the grant here given to Peter. It is impoſſible for them to ſhew, that it contains, or that they derive from it, a right to abſolve and to condemn, as they preſume to do.

But, waving that unprofitable controverſy, let us rejoice in the ſecurity of the Church under the care of Jeſus. It will be oppoſed by ſtrong and malicious adverſaries: but He has engaged for its protection and continuance. Do we, as living ſtones, conſtitute a part of this ſpiritual building? Then we ſhall firmly reſiſt every attack. Can we adopt Peter's confeſſion, with a full conviction of its truth? And is that conviction produced, in conſequence of divine light communicated to the mind? O how great the privilege and bleſſedneſs, thus to be acquainted with the character and ſalvation of Jeſus!

Soon afterwards the Apoſtle received a ſharp reprehenſion. Perhaps, elated by theſe ſingular declarations in his favour, and ſtill entertaining ideas of a temporal kingdom, he could not bear to hear his Maſter foretel the paſſion then approaching, and even dared to cenſure him on that account: he ſaid, "Be

* John xx. 23.

it

it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee *." The address was in every respect unsuitable: it expressed great ignorance and presumption; and therefore he was rebuked for it with an unusual severity. Jesus perceived by what wrong affections his servant was actuated, and, it should seem, he felt the suggestion as a temptation to himself: he replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Alas! how easily may such, as are most exalted in grace, be turned aside by a depraved nature, and both speak and act under the influence of carnal principles, by which, in effect, they promote the purposes of Satan! Let us enquire, Do not we, like Peter, object to the cross, and, as if we had lost our spiritual taste, lay our plans for worldly advancement, through covetousness or ambition? Do we not shew, on some occasions at least, that we do not perfectly understand or comply with the humbling and self-denying scheme of the Gospel? What are we then doing, but taking part with the Devil, and opposing the designs of Jesus?

St. Peter was not only a companion of Christ, together with the other Apostles, but numbered among his most intimate friends, and intrusted with the most unreserved communications of his mind and counsel. He was one of the favoured three, who saw the Saviour transfigured on the mount: and he, in particular, expressed a rapturous delight in the vision and the society there assembled. He cried out in his ec-

* Matt. xvi. 21 – 23.

stasy,

ſtaſy, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moſes, and one for Elias *." This honour he never forgot: many years afterward, and not long before his death, he atteſted the fact, and inſiſted on it as a convincing proof, that he had "not followed cunningly deviſed fables †." We do not look for ſuch revelations of Chriſt: but his people ſtill enjoy his ſpiritual preſence, and by faith behold his glory. At thoſe diſtinguiſhed ſeaſons, when taken up with him to the mount, they feel a pleaſure, which is unutterable, and wiſh to have no more to do with terreſtrial concerns. Their language then is, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

When certain collectors applied for the accuſtomed tribute, Peter readily agreed to pay their demand, and, by his Lord's directions, caught the fiſh, which furniſhed the money for that purpoſe ‡. In one place, he propoſed the queſtion, how often he ſhould forgive an offending brother §. In another, after receiving a ſolemn admonition concerning the danger of riches, he declared, that he had forſaken all from an attachment to his Maſter, and expreſſed a hope of obtaining a recompenſe ||. His profeſſions of regard were ſincere, yet we diſcover in them ſome degree of ſelf-confidence and carnal expectations.

We omit various circumſtances of a leſs intereſting nature, in which his name is introduced; obſerving only, that, throughout the whole hiſtory, he ſtands

* Matt. xvii. 1—8. † 2 Pet. i. 16—18. ‡ Matt. xvii. 24—27. § Matt. xviii. 21. || xix. 27.

diſtinguiſhed by the ardour of his affection for Jeſus, and by the overflowings of his zeal upon all occaſions. He was faithful, bold, and vigorous in the work aſſigned him, ever watching the motions, and ſpringing forward, before all the reſt, to execute the will of his Lord. O that both miniſters and private Chriſtians poſſeſſed a larger meaſure of his fervour and diligence! Alas! we loſe many opportunities of uſefulneſs, through the coldneſs of our hearts in ſpiritual things, and diſhonour our principles by the defect of our ſervices.

We now advance to a part of the ſacred narration, which may juſtly excite much fear and diſtreſs. A mournful ſpectacle is exhibited in the fall of this eminent Apoſtle. We preſume not to allege any excuſes for his conduct, which was ſinful in the extreme, and marked by peculiar aggravations. May we be properly affected by the view, and learn to diſtruſt ourſelves! How prepoſterous it is, for creatures ſo depraved and helpleſs to be lifted up with vain confidence! Who ſhall be able to ſtand, if God withdraw his ſupport?

When our Lord celebrated his laſt paſſover, he inſtructed his diſciples, in the moſt gracious manner, by the ſignificant action of waſhing their feet *. St. Peter, ſurpriſed at his condeſcenſion, objected to his performing this menial office. He ſaid, and, it ſhould ſeem, with real humility, "Thou ſhalt never waſh my feet." But Jeſus taught him, that he ſtood in need of a ſpiritual purgation, to which he ſhould be willing

* John xiii. 1—9.

to

to ſubmit. Immediately the Apoſtle acquieſced, when aſſured that he could have no part in the Saviour, unleſs waſhed by him. Let us learn to cry out for ourſelves, under a ſenſe of our defilement, "Lord, cleanſe my polluted ſoul, and in every reſpect make me holy and acceptable to thyſelf!" Or, in Peter's words, "Lord, not my feet only, but alſo my hands and my head."

Peter requeſted his Lord to explain the hints which he had given about his departure, and was then informed, that he himſelf muſt follow him, not indeed at that time, but after ſome years ſervice in the Church *. He conſidered the reply as containing an intimation of unwillingneſs in him to ſuffer with Jeſus; and, feeling his heart warm with love, he boaſted that he could inſtantly and cheerfully meet death in his Maſter's defence. The declaration accorded with his real ſentiments, but ſavoured too much of preſumption, and proved that he was not properly ſenſible of his own weakneſs and danger. To check this vain boaſting, and put him upon watchfulneſs and prayer, Jeſus repreſented, in a moſt affecting manner, that Satan his ſubtle adverſary was about to aſſault both him and his companions with peculiar vehemence; that he in particular, after ſuffering a ſevere loſs in the conflict, would be preſerved from a total defeat, and recovered for the confirmation of his brethren, in conſequence of the Saviour's interceſſion for him †.

Such information, and from ſuch a perſon, we

* John xiii. 36—38. † Luke xxii. 31—34.

ſhould ſuppoſe, was enough to ſtrike a damp upon the Apoſtle's ſpirit. But he was yet too confident of his own ſtrength to liſten to the warning, and therefore he repeated the declaration, that neither bonds nor death ſhould ſeparate him from his Lord. Jeſus then added a more expreſs and tremendous admonition, ſolemnly affirming, that before the morning watch, in the courſe of that very night, Peter would thrice diſavow all acquaintance with him. And did not this caution produce the proper effect? No: he went out with his Maſter to Gethſemane, but not with ſufficient humility, vigilance, or prayer. Upon the road, he was again reminded of his approaching fall; but, ſtill thinking himſelf incapable of ſuch baſeneſs and treachery, he again maintained with renewed aſſeverations, and in the moſt peremptory manner, that he would ſtand by his Lord in all extremities, and that, however the reſt might act, he would chooſe death rather than deny him *. This was honeſt language; but it clearly betrayed that "haughty ſpirit," which "goeth before a fall †." It always bodes ill, when men ſuſpect others rather than themſelves, and boaſt of their firmneſs, inſtead of calling upon God for ſtrength and protection. O how needful is that petition, "Hold thou me up, and I ſhall be ſafe ‡!"

When they came to the garden of Gethſemane, St. Peter, with the two other favoured diſciples James and John, was admitted to behold the Saviour in his deepeſt diſtreſs §. There he received a ſolemn charge

* Matt. xxvi. 31—35. † Prov. xvi. 18. ‡ Pſal. cxix. 117.
§ Matt. xxvi. 36—46. Mar. xiv. 32—42. Luke xxii. 40—46.

to

to watch with his Lord, and pray againſt temptation. But, even on that occaſion, he diſcovered a very ſinful remiſſneſs. He neglected the directions given him, and, inſtead of being employed in holy exerciſes, fell aſleep. His companions did the ſame; but a ſharp reproof was addreſſed to him in particular, as he had been more confident than the others, "Simon, ſleepeſt Thou? couldſt not thou watch one hour?" The injunction was renewed; yet again and again he ſunk into the ſame exceſſive ſtupor. A poor preparation for a ſeaſon of ſevere trial!

A ſcene of much terror, and that foreboded a tremendous conflict, awaited the diſciples and their Maſter. Jeſus was apprehended by a band of armed men; yet we obſerve that St. Peter, on that event, ſtill maintained an unſhaken conſtancy and courage *. Remembering his vow, he drew his ſword for the reſcue of him he loved, and wounded a ſervant, who was, probably, one of the moſt forward among the impious crew. Thus, as he had determined, he hazarded his life rather than he would forſake Chriſt: and, conſidering this forcible reſiſtance, it is ſurpriſing that both he and his companions were not inſtantly cut to pieces. Raſh and impetuous in his zeal, he forgot his own and their danger; and ſtill more unmindful of the power he had witneſſed, and the ſtrain of doctrine he had heard, he fooliſhly thought to protect, where protection could not be wanted, and ſcrupled not to uſe improper means. Jeſus, therefore, reproved him, and reminded him, that, if any defence had been neceſſary,

* Matt. xxvi 47—54. John xviii. 1—11.

he could have procured thousands of Angels for that purpose. Christians, whose natural disposition is sanguine, are in great danger of adopting violent measures, even for the truth's sake. But the cause of God is not promoted by such expedients. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal*."

Peter beheld his Master taken, bound, and led away as a prisoner; and, perceiving him quietly submit to this treatment, he, together with the other disciples, forsook him and fled †. His boasted courage failed; and, probably, he began to tremble for his own safety. This was a sad change indeed. Yet he seemed to be soon recovered: recovered, alas! to fall the more scandalously. Not long after, he followed Jesus, "afar off," evidently under an impression of fear. He wished to be upon the watch, that he might observe how the whole transaction terminated. He obtained admission into the place of trial, and, to avoid suspicion, mingled with the crowd. He sat down among the idle and profane servants: what poor society was this for an Apostle of Christ! There the temptation commenced; yet it was such, as appeared in itself trifling: at least, he had withstood many, which we might have thought greater. But Satan was

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

† Matt. xxvi. 56, 58, 69—75. Mar. xiv. 66—72. Luke xxii. 54—62. John xviii. 15—27. St. Peter's fall is related by all the Evangelists; but none have described it in a more heinous light than St. Mark: and if, as is generally supposed, that Gospel was reviewed by Peter himself, and written even under his direction, this circumstance may be considered as an evidence of his integrity and sincere contrition.

then

then permitted to have a ſtrong aſcendency over his mind, and to render him, contrary to his natural temper, a moſt abject coward.

A certain female attendant in the high prieſt's palace charged him with being a diſciple of Jeſus. He was inſtantly confounded, and expreſsly declared that he did not ſo much as know him. Perhaps ſhocked at his own words, he went out, and heard the cock crow. Did not that ſound bring to his recollection the caution, which he had received? Poſſibly, this might be the caſe; yet immediately after that warning, being interrogated by different perſons, he fell again; confirming his former denial of his Maſter with ſtronger aſſeverations, and even with an oath. An hour afterwards, the accuſation was renewed by freſh witneſſes; and the third time this eminent, diſtinguiſhed, and zealous Apoſtle diſavowed all connection and acquaintance with Jeſus. This he did in language, which might be calculated to clear him from the imputation, but which we ſhould have ſuppoſed could never come out of ſuch a mouth: "he began to curſe and to ſwear."

We ſtand amazed, while we view the atrocious ſin, with all its aggravations. If we have been preſerved from ſo ſhameful a declenſion, O what thanks and praiſes are due to Him, who hath kept our ſouls! But this hiſtory will teach us not to preſume on our imagined ſteadfaſtneſs. We are ſtill liable to be tempted and overcome. Nay, there is no wickedneſs ſo heinous, which we may not be induced to perpetrate. Our danger is the greater, as we are con-

ſtantly watched by a ſubtle and malicious adverſary, who "deſires to have us, that he may ſift us as wheat." O let us be the more vigilant, and prepared to reſiſt his attacks! There were ſome preceding ſteps, which led to Peter's calamitous miſcarriage. He depended upon his own ſtrength, neglected to pray, and mixed with bad company. Let this be regarded and improved as a ſolemn caution to ourſelves. Let us beware of thoſe omiſſions and failures, which are thought trifling: they may lead to the moſt fatal events.

Such caſes are moſt lamentable; and yet the Lord God ſees fit to permit them, and even renders them ſubſervient to his own gracious purpoſes. His offending people are more deeply abaſed, while their painful experience teſtifies their total depravity and entire helpleſſneſs: they learn to walk more circumſpectly, perceive more of the excellency and value of redemption, and become more cordially attached to the Saviour. There are perſons, indeed, upon whom theſe inſtances have a bad effect: but they muſt anſwer for their own perverſe abuſes. If they are encouraged to ſin, here is nothing which can juſtify their conduct. They prove their own deſperate wickedneſs, while they plead the examples of others; ſo that their very excuſes will be turned againſt themſelves.

The fall of Peter was ſcandalous, but not of long continuance. The ſame night, and almoſt the ſame hour, he was reſtored and brought back to God as a weeping penitent. Immediately after his laſt profane

ſane declaration, the cock crew the ſecond time; and, it ſhould ſeem, that ſound, which ſo exactly fulfilled the previous admonition given him, deeply affected his heart. But, more eſpecially, he was awakened by the eye of his injured maſter, who had been within the hearing of ſome of his impious ſpeeches. "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered his word." That look pierced his very ſoul: and yet, we apprehend, it was a look, not of indignation, which would have driven him to deſpair, but of the moſt compaſſionate regard: it upbraided him for his treachery, but encouraged his hope of forgiveneſs. Then he beheld the heinouſneſs of his tranſgreſſion; and, under the ſtrong influence of ſhame, confuſion, and pungent ſorrow, he ſought where he might hide his head, and vent the diſtreſſes of his mind. "He went out and wept bitterly." Where, then, is the promiſed ſweetneſs of ſin? Rather, what complicated miſeries does it produce! How deep the wound, which it leaves upon the conſcience! Many, alas! are almoſt overwhelmed with anguiſh, on account of their backſlidings, and cry out day and night, with a painful remembrance of what they have loſt, "Reſtore unto me the joy of thy ſalvation *." Yet let them not ſay, "There is no hope;" ſince we here refer them to one, who was recovered from his fall, pardoned, and again eſtabliſhed with equal, if not with greater, ſtrength.

We read no more of this Apoſtle, till the morning of the reſurrection. The interval muſt have been

* Pſal. li. 12.

to him a ſeaſon of extreme affliction, ſpent in prayers and tears. But, upon the firſt tidings that the Lord was riſen, Peter, who was in John's company, ran with eager haſte to ſee the ſepulchre *. A celeſtial meſſenger, proclaiming the joyful event to certain pious women, directed them to inform the diſciples of their Maſter's deſign to meet them, and made mention of Peter's name in particular. This was calculated to comfort him, as it conveyed an intimation, that he was not abandoned or forgotten †. Soon afterwards, on the ſame day, Jeſus ſhewed himſelf alive to him, before the reſt of the Apoſtles had obtained that ſight: and there was not one, who ſtood ſo much in need of ſupport and conſolation ‡.

The Saviour, alſo, after his reſurrection, favoured him with peculiar notice, in a very remarkable interview at the ſea of Tiberias §. He appeared to Peter and certain other diſciples, who were fiſhing, and by his miraculous influence filled their net with large fiſhes. Peter, diſcovering his dear Lord upon the ſhore, inſtantly caſt himſelf out of the ſhip, that he might ſwim to him, and teſtify the ſtrength of his attachment. They dined together, and then a moſt affecting diſcourſe enſued.

The former profeſſions of the Apoſtle might ſeem to be rendered dubious, if not entirely falſified, by his late miſconduct. Probably with a reference to this circumſtance, Jeſus now enquired, whether his love was indeed greater than that of others, as he

* John xx. 1—10. † Mar. xvi. 7. ‡ Luke xxiv. 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5. § John xxi. 1, &c.

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had once boasted. The interrogation conveyed a tender reproof, to which Peter replied only by appealing to Jesus, as acquainted with the state of his heart, for the sincerity of his regard. He was then commanded to give evidence of it, by attending to his pastoral office, and feeding the meanest and weakest of the flock. This contained, in effect, a renewal of his Apostolic commission, and therefore a full testimony of forgiveness. Thrice was the question proposed, and thrice did he call upon the Saviour, to whom his inmost soul was open, for the attestation of his integrity. But, having become more diffident of himself, he presumed not to intimate, that he felt a stronger affection than the rest. As the charge, also, was thrice repeated, there could not remain a doubt, that he was reinstated in his place. Jesus predicted, that in his old age he should suffer a violent death, and glorify God in the pains of crucifixion, and concluded his prophecy with an injunction to follow the steps of his Master. Peter wished to be informed, what would become of John, but received for answer, that, leaving the concerns of others, he must attend to his own, and labour to imitate the example set before him.

Here we pause, and stand in admiration of that grace, which can pardon, restore, and save, even the most heinous backsliders. "Return unto the Lord your God," you, who "have fallen by your iniquity." He himself declares, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely *." O confess

* Hos. xiv. 1, 4.

your baſeneſs, and weep with genuine contrition for your aggravated offence! But conſider alſo, if you have obtained mercy, and God be pleaſed to employ you again in his ſervice, what grateful acknowledgments of his love, what vigorous exertions to promote his cauſe, are due from you more than from others? You cannot expiate your guilt, or repair the miſchief you have done: but deſire, at leaſt, to prove your recovery, exhort your brethren to maintain their ſteadfaſtneſs, and labour to bring again thoſe, who, like yourſelves, have been driven away. Let your great Exemplar be ever before your eyes. Follow him more cloſely and conſtantly than before; follow him, even unto death, and you ſhall finally reign with him in glory. Amen.

SAINT PETER.

SECT. 2.

Peter proposed the election of a new Apostle—preached on the day of Pentecost—healed a lame man, and addressed the people—imprisoned—pleaded before the Sanhedrim—detected Ananias—was again imprisoned, brought before the Sanhedrim, and scourged—went to Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, and Cesarea—defended his conduct towards Cornelius—delivered from Herod—attended the council at Jerusalem—reproved by St. Paul at Antioch—his writings, and death.

THOSE vows and professions of repentance, which are not accompanied with its genuine fruits, deserve no credit. Saint Peter received a particular injunction to prove his recovery, by confirming the faith of his brethren, and feeding the flock of Christ *. And an evidence was given through the whole succeeding part of his life, of a zeal unquestionably pure, and of a diligence which knew not, or complained not of fatigue. "The Acts of the Apostles" have put his character beyond a doubt: the twelve first chapters chiefly relate to him, and demonstrate by the strongest testimonies, that his contrition was sincere, and his subsequent conduct con-

* Luke xxii. 32. John xxi. 15.

ſiſtent and honourable. Many circumſtances may be concealed from us; but enough is recorded, to ſhew, that he obtained forgiveneſs, and continued for many years an extenſive bleſſing to the Church. As he lived, ſo we have reaſon to believe that he died, in the bold profeſſion and defence of the Goſpel. May they, whoſe caſes reſemble his, learn in like manner to walk more circumſpectly in future, labour more abundantly to be uſeful in their generation, and exhort others to beware of thoſe miſcarriages, which have brought ſuch anguiſh upon themſelves!

When our Lord aſcended into heaven with great triumph and glory, it is probable that Peter was one of thoſe, who followed him with their eyes, till a cloud received him out of their ſight; it is certain, he was one of that faithful, though, little, band, which remained at Jeruſalem in a ſtate of holy fellowſhip, and anxious expectation of the promiſed bleſſing *. He it was, who addreſſed the Church upon the apoſtaſy of Judas, ſhewing that the ſcriptures were fulfilled in him, and that his place among the Apoſtles ſhould be ſupplied by a freſh election.

On the day of Pentecoſt, the Holy Ghoſt deſcended with miraculous influences upon all the twelve, but our attention is directed to St. Peter, more than to the others †. Though it does not appear that he was diſtinguiſhed above the reſt by ſuperior powers, yet he ſtood forward with peculiar courage. He firſt opened the grand commiſſion of the Goſpel, and the effect of his preaching, on that memorable occa-

* Acts i. 9, 13, &c. † ii. 14, &c.

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ſion, was moſt viſible and extenſive. In his ſolemn diſcourſe to the people, he replied to the ſcandalous reproach, caſt upon him and his brethren, and alleged, that the gift of tongues, which excited ſuch aſtoniſhment, ought not to be aſcribed to intoxication, but to the extraordinary effuſion of the Spirit, which had been expreſsly foretold. By a moſt decided teſtimony, he maintained, that Jeſus had wrought various unqueſtionable miracles, and, after being injuriouſly put to death, had been raiſed from the grave, according to David's prophetical deſcription. He argued, that He, who expired on the croſs, had taken his ſeat at the right hand of God, and, having fulfilled his own promiſe in communicating ſo large a meaſure of the Holy Ghoſt, had proved himſelf to be the true Meſſiah, the very Saviour, who ſhould come into the world.

An immediate and deep impreſſion was made upon the minds of the audience. Many expreſſed the moſt pungent anguiſh and terror, while they earneſtly implored direction from the Apoſtles. Peter inſtantly called them to the exerciſe of repentance, required them to be baptized in token of their ſubmiſſion to Jeſus and dependence on his merits, and encouraged them to expect from Him the gift of the Spirit. How venerable did the preacher appear, when, with a holy fervour of zeal and love, he ſtood and beſought the ſurrounding multitudes to be ſaved from that perverſe generation! O that all the miniſters of Chriſt poſſeſſed the like ardour, and that the labours of thoſe, who do exert themſelves in the ſame honourable

nourable ſervice, were crowned with ſimilar ſucceſs! Let them lift up the ſtandard of the croſs, and doubt not that God will proſper their efforts for the enlargement of his kingdom.

We inſiſt not in this place on the various miraculous operations performed by the Apoſtles, nor on the happy ſtate of charity, peace, and piety, in which the primitive Church lived together, as their very enemies obſerved with aſtoniſhment. That deſcription would exhibit a pleaſing picture, and ſtrongly recommend our religion; but it does not immediately relate to the character of St. Peter.

Soon after the feaſt of Pentecoſt, he is again brought forwards on a very intereſting occaſion *. He went to the temple, in company with John, at the uſual hour of prayer, when a poor man, who had been a cripple from his birth, ſolicited relief. "Silver and gold have I none," ſaid this meſſenger of peace, "but ſuch as I have give I thee: in the name of Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth, riſe up and walk." A perfect cure inſtantly ſucceeded; and ſo public was the caſe, that it excited general notice. Crowds of people flocked together, that they might ſee the wondrous perſons, whoſe words had given feet to the lame.

Peter ſought not their applauſe, and therefore eagerly ſeized the opportunity of turning off their attention from himſelf to his dear Lord and Maſter, whom he affectionately commended to their regard. He boldly charged them with the moſt heinous guilt,

* Acts iii. 1, &c.

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in having crucified the Prince of life, and exhorted them to repent and believe on Him, who was raiſed from the dead, that they might receive pardon and peace. He argued, that Jeſus had fulfilled their ancient prophecies, and juſtly demanded their ſubmiſſion. He ſtated the nature and excellence of the ſalvation propoſed, declaring that their long expected Meſſiah was ſent "to bleſs them, in turning away every one of them from their iniquities." A ſimilar mode of addreſs, from thoſe who labour in the Goſpel, will be at all times proper. They alſo "preach not themſelves, but Chriſt Jeſus the Lord *." It is of neceſſity, that they endeavour to fix upon the minds of their hearers a conviction of ſin, without which the offer of deliverance will not meet with any cordial acceptance. They muſt cry aloud, "Repent ye, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out, when the times of refreſhing ſhall come from the preſence of the Lord." They proclaim, that "the Redeemer is come to Zion," and, while they exhibit his ineſtimable benefits, they maintain, that thoſe only can enjoy them, who "turn from tranſgreſſion †."

The zealous exertions of the two Apoſtles provoked the reſentment of the prieſts and rulers, and occaſioned their own arreſt and impriſonment ‡. But a great honour was put upon them, though caſt into a dungeon. They had preached to good effect, as it appeared that the Church received a large increaſe through their word. On the day following they ſtood arraigned before the Sanhedrim, being called to an-

* 2 Cor. iv. 5. † Iſa. lix. 20. ‡ Acts iv. 1, &c.

 ſwer

ſwer for their conduct. Peter was the ſpeaker, and diſplayed an uncommon degree of courage; but at this we do not wonder, when informed that he acted immediately and entirely under the influence of the Holy Ghoſt. He declared, that the cure of the lame man had been wrought by the power, and through faith in the name, of Jeſus. Forgetting his own ſituation as a priſoner at the bar, or diſregarding his ſafety, he charged his judges with the murder of his Lord, whom he aſſerted to be raiſed from the dead, and warned them that by Him alone ſalvation could be obtained.

Such undaunted fortitude in one, whom they had deſpiſed as a low and illiterate perſon, confounded the council, and they knew not what ſteps to take. However, they ſtrictly enjoined him, not to preſume to propagate the Chriſtian doctrine: and, had the ſcheme been of human contrivance, it is probable that it would have been inſtantly defeated. But, as the work was of God, they could not overthrow it; their rage was vain, their threatenings ineffectual. Peter and John ſtood unmoved, and declared their determination never to deſiſt from the cauſe, in which they were engaged, appealing even to this malignant aſſembly, for the juſtification of their conduct. "Whether it be right," ſaid they, "in the ſight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." For that time they were diſmiſſed, but with freſh menaces; and when they had joined their brethren, the whole company united in prayer. They ſpread their caſe before the Lord, and entreated Him ſtill to ſupport and proſper them in the propagation of the Goſpel.

pel. Their petitions obtained an immediate and favourable anſwer: the Holy Spirit came upon them, perhaps with ſome external tokens as before, and enabled them with renewed vigour to perſiſt in the ſervice of their Maſter.

Do not ſuch examples make us aſhamed of our own timidity? Is it not neceſſary for us to be as firm and undaunted in the profeſſion of the truth, as St. Peter was? Or, will it be right, in any inſtance, to hearken unto men, more than unto God? Yet are we not doing this, while by diſhonourable compliances we ſeek to evade perſecution? You, who love the Lord, being perſuaded of the excellence of your cauſe, ſhould poſſeſs an unſhaken courage. Whatever your enemies may threaten, by prayer and faith commit yourſelves to Him, whoſe you are, and whom you ſerve, and then you need not dread any conſequences. He will communicate to you more abundant grace, which ſhall be ſufficient to ſuſtain you in the ſevereſt conflict.

The Church continued to increaſe and proſper; though the hypocriſy of ſome profeſſed members produced a painful trial*. Ananias and Sapphira were convicted by St. Peter of the baſeſt diſſimulation, and inſtantly ſtruck dead at his word. This circumſtance, however, tremendous as it was, turned out "to the furtherance of the Goſpel;" which more evidently appeared to be the cauſe of heaven. Our Apoſtle, in particular, was held in profound veneration: he wrought various wonderful cures, which are not minutely

* Acts v. 1, &c.

nutely described; nay, his very ſhadow proved to many perſons the means of miraculous recovery. Who, then, could refuſe to be convinced, that theſe men were indeed the meſſengers of the living God?

Still the Jewiſh rulers oppoſed, and, being filled with violent indignation, caſt all the Apoſtles together into the common priſon. Yet no bonds could ſilence theſe witneſſes of God's truth. An Angel reſcued them from their confinement; and by his direction they proceeded to preach the ſame doctrine, as publicly and as earneſtly as before. Again they were brought before the Sanhedrim; when the high prieſt expreſſed the keeneſt reſentment, becauſe they had deſpiſed the injunctions and threatenings of the council. Peter undertook to anſwer, in the name of his brethren; and maintaining, as on a former occaſion, that no commands of men would exempt them from obedience to God, he boldly declared the grand principles of the Goſpel before his judges. He was evidently more ſolicitous to ſave their ſouls, than procure his own deliverance, while he ſtated, that the very perſon, whom they had crucified as a vile malefactor, being raiſed from the dead, and exalted to the higheſt glory, as a Prince and a Saviour, was ready to diſpenſe the bleſſings of repentance and forgiveneſs.

His addreſs increaſed the rage of the audience; and a propoſal was made to take away the life of theſe troubleſome men. But after ſome conſultation they were diſmiſſed, having been firſt ſcourged, and again charged to preach no more in the name of Jeſus.

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This violence, however, damped neither their courage nor their joy. They accounted themſelves peculiarly honoured in ſuffering for ſuch a Maſter, and continued to declare his truth both in public and private, though with great apparent danger to themſelves.

A more ſtriking picture of Chriſtian fortitude, faith, and zeal, cannot be exhibited. Do we not almoſt envy the chains and ſtripes of St. Peter and his companions? He has aſſured us, that, "if we be reproached for the name of Chriſt, happy are we; for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon us *." But have we ever felt the influence of the love of Jeſus, ſo as to be willing to give up eaſe, liberty, and life, for his ſake? Do we regard him, according to Peter's doctrine, as "the Stone, which is become the head of the corner?" Do we look up to him, as ſeated on his throne in heaven, and imparting, to every humble petitioner on earth, repentance and remiſſion of ſins?

The intrepidity of the Apoſtle, in the tranſactions now related, forms a ſtrong contraſt to that part of his conduct, when he was aſhamed to confeſs his Lord before a ſervant maid. And to what ſhall we aſcribe this difference? In his baſe denial of Chriſt we ſee the weakneſs and depravity even of good men, and their liableneſs to fall by thoſe very temptations, of which they are warned, and againſt which they have moſt ſtrenuouſly reſolved. But in his bold defence before the council we behold, not ſo much

* 1 Pet. iv. 14.

the natural impetuosity and constitutional courage of his mind, as the power of divine grace: we perceive that God can qualify his servants for the work assigned them, and support them in every danger. O let us learn to maintain an entire dependence upon Him, and he will help us according to our need!

A. D. 34. After some time, the Apostles at Jerusalem, having heard that the inhabitants of Samaria had embraced the Gospel, sent Peter and John for the purpose of establishing them in the faith, and imparting to them some spiritual gifts *. Upon that occasion a singular case occurred. Simon, a noted magician, observing that the Holy Ghost was conferred by these two eminent teachers, ignorantly and impiously proposed to purchase the same power by a sum of money. Peter immediately rejected the offer with disdain, reproved his base hypocrisy, warned him of his danger, and earnestly exhorted him to repentance and prayer. He addressed himself to the sinner's conscience with plainness and fidelity. And will it not be allowed, that succeeding ministers should in like manner, without reserve, "declare all the counsel of God?"

Having preached in different parts of Samaria, he returned to Jerusalem. During his continuance in that city, he received a visit from the young convert and Apostle St. Paul; yet neither then, nor at any other time, was such a supremacy acknowledged in Peter, as the church of Rome pleads for †. No external perse-

* Acts viii. 14--25. † Acts ix. 27. Gal. i 18.

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cution preventing him, he ſoon afterwards took an extenſive circuit, that he might ſpread the Goſpel from town to town. "He paſſed through all quarters," teſtifying of Chriſt, and working miracles: ſo illuſtriouſly were the grace and power of God exhibited in him *!

To Eneas, a poor afflicted paralytic, he ſpake in the name of his divine Maſter; and health and vigour were inſtantly reſtored. The aſtoniſhing cure was rendered more remarkable by the effects which it produced: the inhabitants of the town, which was called Lydda, "turned to the Lord." He was ſent for to Joppa, which lay in that neighbourhood, on occaſion of the death of an eminently pious woman, Tabitha, or Dorcas; and at his word, after ſolemn prayer to God, ſhe revived. This extraordinary miracle, alſo, tended to the enlargement of the Church. Many were convinced, and received the Chriſtian doctrine: Peter, therefore, continued with them for ſome time, that he might confirm them in the faith. How honourable and uſeful his employment! In ſome meaſure reſembling his dear Lord, he "went about doing good," adminiſtering relief to the diſeaſed in body, with a view to promote their ſpiritual and eternal welfare. O may we live under the influence of this holy and benevolent principle! Though we poſſeſs not miraculous powers, yet ſomething may be effected in our reſpective places, for the honour of Chriſt, and the ſalvation of our fellow-creatures.

* Acts ix. 32, &c.

A. D. 41. From Joppa St. Peter removed to Ceſarea upon a ſingular occurrence, which introduces a moſt important hiſtory. "The Goſpel of the circumciſion was committed to him *," but it pleaſed God to diſtinguiſh him, alſo, as the firſt inſtrument of carrying the glad tidings to the Gentiles. And now the grand diſpenſation, the myſtery, which had been kept ſecret for ages, began to be unfolded, "that the Gentiles ſhould be fellow-heirs, and of the ſame body, and partakers of the promiſe in Chriſt †." The Apoſtles themſelves were with difficulty perſuaded to believe it, though it had been ſo expreſsly predicted by the ancient prophets. A particular revelation prepared the mind of Peter for propoſing theſe high privileges to the Heathens, and removed his objections.

When he had retired for prayer about the middle of the day, according to the practice of devout perſons, the Lord taught him by a viſible repreſentation, three times repeated, that the diſtinction of clean and unclean, appointed by the ceremonial law, was about to ceaſe, and that what God had ſanctified, he muſt not reject as common or polluted ‡. Juſt at that inſtant certain meſſengers from Cornelius, who had been ſent by divine direction, enquired for the Apoſtle: and, that his Jewiſh prejudices might not prevent him, he received expreſs inſtructions from the Spirit to go with them. If God evidently lead the way, we ought not to heſitate. Yet, alas! through perverſe-

* Gal. ii. 7. † Eph. iii. 6. ‡ Acts x. 1, &c.

neſs,

nefs, obftinacy, and many corrupt tempers, we are often unwilling to follow, even where the line of duty is accurately marked out. May the grace of our God render us obedient to his will, by whatever means it is made known!

Peter went to Cefarea, and there fhewed that he fought not his own glory, but that of his Mafter: fenfible of what was due to him, and confcious of his own demerits, he declined the homage, which Cornelius imprudently offered. Many of the Centurion's friends were affembled to hear the doctrine of this extraordinary teacher. Accordingly, after ftating on what grounds he had undertaken the journey, he proceeded to preach the Gofpel to them without referve. He declared his full conviction, that a way of accefs to God was opened for men of every nation: he infifted on the character and work of Jefus, on his life, death, refurrection, and the future judgment: he maintained, that, agreeably to God's revelations by his prophets from the beginning, remiffion of fins could now be obtained by all who believe in the Saviour's name. It pleafed God to confirm the word, and prove undeniably that he would have the Gentiles admitted into his Church: for thofe purpofes, the Holy Ghoft immediately defcended upon all the company. After fuch an atteftation of divine acceptance, the Apoftle could not be unwilling to receive them as his Chriftian brethren. He commanded them, therefore, to be baptized, and, at their earneft requeft, for their further inftruction and advancement, he continued with them fome days.

We

We rejoice, that the ſame bleſſed meſſage of ſalvation is come even unto us, who were once in Pagan darkneſs, and that God ſtill gives teſtimony to the preaching of his truth by the demonſtration of his Spirit, though not in ſo extraordinary a manner. Pardon and peace are offered in the name of Jeſus; and, by the faith of him, many among us, "who were ſometime alienated, are now reconciled" to God. We ſhould be glad to obſerve that others, as well as ourſelves, are recovered, from whatever ſtate, and by whatever means, they may be called. Though they were once of a different religion, or of no religion at all, we ſhould exult in their ſalvation, like the Angels in heaven. If the Lord God has ſealed them for his own by the Holy Ghoſt, who are we, that we ſhould refuſe them "the right hand of fellowſhip?"

The free communication of St. Peter with the Gentiles, as here related, gave offence to ſome of his Jewiſh brethren at Jeruſalem *. But, upon his returning to that place, and explicitly declaring the matter, their vehement prejudices were in a great meaſure removed, and they adored the grace of God, which was imparted to the uncircumciſed. Too frequently, alas! good men, through haſte or bigotry, take umbrage at the conduct of others, whom they would ceaſe to cenſure, if they properly underſtood their ſituation, and the grounds on which they act.

A.D. 44. After ſome time, a violent perſecution aroſe againſt the Church. Herod Agrippa, that proud

* Acts xi. 1—18.

and cruel tyrant, having put James to death, caſt Peter into priſon, and commanded him to be kept under a ſtrong guard, till he ſhould be brought forth to public execution, for the entertainment of the people *. The Apoſtle, however, had numerous friends, who made continual interceſſion for him, not at the court of Herod, but before the throne of God: and their prayers procured his deliverance. Vain were all the precautions and means uſed for his confinement: the king's intention was fruſtrated, the expectation of the profane multitude diſappointed. The very night preceding the day appointed for Peter's ſuffering, while he ſlept with compoſure, not dreading the event, an Angel appeared to reſcue him. Inſtantly his chains fell off, the iron gates gave way, and, under the conduct of his heavenly guide, he went out through the midſt of ſentinels without interruption.

Juſt at that time many pious perſons were actually engaged in offering up their ſupplications for the Apoſtle, when they were aſſured by his arrival amongſt them, that they had obtained acceptance. After indulging his grateful and devout ſenſations with his friends and brethren, praiſing God for this extraordinary diſpenſation, he retired from them, ſeeking, probably, a more convenient retreat. His diſappointed enemies were enraged at his eſcape, and the guards, who had been ſet over him, put to death in his ſtead. "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; juſt and true are thy ways, thou King of ſaints! Who ſhall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify

* Acts xii. 1—19.

thy

thy name *?" He is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," who "pleadeth the cause of his people †." He may suffer them to be oppressed through tyrants; yet in many remarkable cases he has displayed his regard for them, and proved, that "their Redeemer is strong ‡." The instance before us stands as a convincing token of his gracious attention to prayer. The importunate cries of the poor persecuted saints opened the prison doors, and delivered an Apostle. O let us be encouraged, in every distress, to make known our requests unto God, with greater frequency and fervour, and we shall surely prevail!

A. D. 52. St. Peter is again introduced to our notice in the grand council of the Church at Jerusalem. When the question was there agitated, whether obedience to the Mosaic law should be urged upon the believing Gentiles, he rose up and declared, how God had commissioned him to preach the Gospel to the uncircumcised, had given them the Holy Spirit, and purified their hearts by faith §. He argued, therefore, that, being received to the divine favour without ceremonial observances, they should be left to their full liberty; and he maintained the important doctrine, that none can be saved any otherwise than through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, on one occasion afterwards, he acted inconsistently with his professed principles. At Antioch he lived on terms of Christian fellowship with the converted Gentiles, but at length withdrew from their

* Rev. xv. 3, 4. † Isa. xxviii. 29. li. 22. ‡ Jer. l. 34.
§ Acts xv. 6—11.

society,

ſociety, through the fear of diſpleaſing certain Jewiſh zealots, who came to that place *. This wavering conduct produced bad effects. Many, through the influence of his example, betrayed the ſame timidity; and, while he endeavoured to conciliate one ſide, he grieved and ſtaggered another. St. Paul, therefore, ſharply reproved him, repreſenting, that from his behaviour it might ſeem, as if he did not conſider the believing Gentiles in a ſtate of acceptance, or had renounced the fundamental doctrine of juſtification by faith alone.

What ſhall we ſay to this inſtance of unſteadineſs? We preſume not to defend it; "becauſe he was to be blamed." It does not appear, that he offered any excuſe for himſelf, and we ſhould hope, that he frankly confeſſed and immediately repented of his fault. The moſt eminent Apoſtles are not propoſed as perfect patterns. They all diſcovered failings, and were liable to be again and again overcome by temptations, even as we are. Let us beware for ourſelves. Are there not thoſe among us, who are guilty of mean compliances, and who, not merely in one inſtance, but habitually, counteract the dictates of conſcience, through fear of temporal inconveniences? Do we not too much conſult the world, how far they will allow us to aſſociate with ſerious Chriſtians? Let us abhor diſſimulation, and act an open and upright part. Whatever we may ſuffer, let us determine to "walk according to the truth of the Goſpel," and not heſitate to ſhew our cordial attachment to the people of God.

* Gal. ii. 11, &c.

Peter

Peter betrayed a wrong ſpirit, and Paul was his reprover; a circumſtance, which ſtrongly confirms the doctrine, which they preached. If there had been any colluſion, any cheat practiſed upon mankind, it would certainly have been diſcovered, when the two great champions differed. Yet even then they perfectly agreed in matters of opinion, and afterwards continued to maintain the ſame principles, and promote the ſame work, as "labourers together with God."

The life of St. Peter was protracted to a conſiderable length, and ſpent in active exertions for the honour of his Maſter. It ſhould ſeem, that his wife accompanied him in his travels, and that they both ſubſiſted upon the bounty of others *. Some precious remains of his writings are tranſmitted to us; and by theſe he yet ſpeaketh, and will ſpeak to the end of time. His two Epiſtles were addreſſed to the diſperſed Chriſtians, for the purpoſe of comforting them in their troubles, confirming them in the faith, warning them againſt ſeducers, enlivening their hopes, and regulating their conduct. Let us ſtudy theſe inſpired exhortations with ſerious attention, till they have produced their full influence upon our hearts. Surely we cannot refuſe to liſten to ſo venerable "an elder," who was "a witneſs of the ſufferings of Chriſt, and alſo a partaker of the glory that ſhall be revealed †." Both theſe Epiſtles were compoſed in his old age, and they ſeem to be marked with its character: in the ſecond eſpecially, his language is that of one, who

* 1 Cor. ix. 5. † 1 Pet. v. 1.

conſidered

confidered his diffolution as at hand, and who was taking leave of the world. Here, then, he has delivered his moft folemn thoughts, in the near view of eternity. And did he waver in his mind? Did he renounce his principles? No: far otherwife. He defired moft earneftly, that his inftructions might be always remembered after his deceafe *: and, having defcribed, with an aftonifhing grandeur and majefty, the deftruction of the earth, and the appearance of Chrift as the univerfal Judge, he added, "What manner of perfons ought ye to be in all holy converfation and godlinefs, looking for and hafting unto the coming of the day of God †!"

A. D. about 67. At length he finifhed his courfe in an honourable manner: he died a martyr, (it is thought when he was about feventy-five years old) and fealed with his blood the truth, which he had preached. His Lord had foretold, that he fhould be taken off by a violent death, even that of crucifixion ‡; and this came to pafs under the tyranny of Nero. It is believed, that both he and St. Paul fuffered at Rome about the fame time, and that St. Peter was crucified with his head downwards, at his own defire, as if he thought himfelf unworthy to refemble his Mafter. Be that as it may, he now appears in glory, where, amongft all "the noble army of martyrs §," he will admire and praife his God and Saviour, and reign with him for ever and ever.

Many Prophets, Apoftles, and minifters, have loft their lives in vindication of the Gofpel; but, while

* 2 Pet. i. 15. † iii. 11, 12. ‡ John xxi. 18, 19. § Te Deum.

we lament the removal of ſuch able advocates, we rejoice that God will plead his own cauſe, and make the word of his grace to proſper from age to age. We would enquire of every reader, and entreat him earneſtly to put the queſtion to himſelf, Is not that ſyſtem of faith, for which St. Peter died, worthy of attention? Or, "how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?" Deſire, then, to know and feel the excellency of thoſe principles, for the defence of which ſo much has been done and ſuffered: according to the exhortation of this inſpired writer, "give diligence to make your calling and election ſure *."

* 2 Pet. i. 10.

SAINT

SAINT JOHN

THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST.

CHAP. VI.

John, his parentage and occupation—called by Christ—appointed an Apostle—was present at the transfiguration—forbad one casting out devils—proposed to consume the Samaritans—petitioned for the highest place—attended his Lord at the last passover, in Gethsemane, and at the cross—was the first who believed the resurrection—laboured with Peter at Jerusalem, and in Samaria—banished to Patmos—preached and died at Ephesus—his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelations.

ALL the Apostles of Jesus, excepting the traitor, possessed a real excellence of character; yet in some of them we may trace a difference. They believed and felt the same principles, and were endowed with equal integrity, whilst the natural temper of each gave a bias to his conduct and a trait to his manners, which distinguished him from the rest of his brethren, and which enhanced or diminished the value of his friendship. God gives his grace to men, whose inclinations and habits are unlike, and they are blessed with the same salvation, yet, as the ordinary varieties of the human mould still remain in them, their virtue is more or less

engaging and attractive. The eleven were all, but not equally, dear to their Master: some obtained marks of his peculiar esteem. We presume not to censure his conduct, or to demand the reasons on which he acts. If Christ, who took our nature, yielded not to those sensations, which incline us to prefer one companion to another, yet He is the sovereign Lord, and has a right to bestow his favours, when and as he pleases. Three of those, whom he had chosen out of the world, were honoured above the rest by his attention: and, of these three, one was admitted to a nearer intimacy, and a larger share of his regard. This was he, whose history is now introduced to our notice, and who is so frequently described by that expression, "the disciple, whom Jesus loved." St. John, it is allowed, possessed an uncommon sweetness of temper; and, perhaps, as we have hinted, that strong affection, and close union which subsisted between him and his Lord, may be ascribed to their reciprocal feelings, occasioned by the similarity of their dispositions. Certain it is, that in proportion as we cultivate the spirit of love, we shall enjoy a familiarity of intercourse with Christ. An imitation of this favoured Apostle will, likewise, bring credit to our profession of the Gospel, and add much to the peace and happiness of our own souls.

The followers of Jesus were chiefly such as obtained not any high distinction among men. He makes no account of the embellishments, which catch the notice and admiration of the world: he passes by many of elevated rank, and "exalteth them of low degree." The parentage of John was mean; his

ſituation in life, obſcure. His brother James and he were ſons of Zebedee, a fiſherman at Bethſaida in Galilee, and brought up to the ſame occupation. Theſe two were partners with Peter and Andrew in the concerns of their trade, and commenced their attendance upon the Saviour at the ſame time *. Being ſtruck with amazement at the miraculous draught of fiſhes, which had been taken under the direction of Jeſus, they were inſtantly diſpoſed to obey his call. At his word they forſook their father, their veſſels, and employment; and, becoming his ſtated followers, were prepared for the Apoſtleſhip, to which they were ſoon afterwards appointed. The ſummons, pronounced by Chriſt, being accompanied by the influence of his Spirit, prevented or removed from their minds every objection. Thus alſo, in general, the people, who enter upon his ſervice, are "willing in the day of his power †" to undergo every difficulty for his ſake. Let us pray with our Church, that, after this example, we may forſake all worldly and carnal affections, and be evermore ready to follow God's holy commandments through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord ‡.

The two brothers, probably, reſembled each other in diſpoſition, and are ſo frequently mentioned together, that we ſhall find many of the ſame things related of them both. When ordained to the Apoſtleſhip, they were called by one name, "Boanerges," or "The ſons of thunder §." The appellation, we preſume, does not imply that the manner of their addreſs

* Matt. iv. 21, 22. Luke v. 10, 11. † Pſal. cx. 3. ‡ Collect for St. James the Apoſtle. § Mar. iii. 17.

was terrific, which would be inconsiſtent with the gentle and loving ſpirit of St. John, but it denotes, rather, the fervour of their zeal, and the efficacy of their preaching, which, like thunder, ſhook many hearts, and overcame the ſtrongeſt oppoſition. O for men of this deſcription, to ſtand forth as advocates for Chriſt in the preſent age!

John is ſuppoſed to have been the youngeſt of the Apoſtles, and appointed to the ſacred function, when he was not more than twenty-ſix years old. It is truly deſirable to give up the heart to God, and begin his work, in early life; that our beſt days and the vigour both of body and mind may be devoted to his ſervice. How much miſchief might thus be prevented, what extenſive uſefulneſs promoted!

St. John was one of the three honoured companions of Chriſt, who were admitted to behold him in his glory on the mount of transfiguration *. Probably, from that heavenly viſion he was led with greater earneſtneſs to contemplate and admire his divine Maſter, of whoſe dignity he had received ſuch a tranſcendent proof. He recommended him, therefore, to the regard of others, from a clear knowledge of his perſon, and an attentive conſideration of his excellency. Thus he writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have ſeen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life, declare we unto you, that ye alſo may have fellowſhip with us †."

* Matt. xvii. 1. † 1 John i. 1—3.

Yet

Yet even in John, who enjoyed the moſt intimate communications with the Saviour, we perceive the depravity of human nature. He felt the conflict, ariſing from "the fleſh luſting againſt the Spirit," and diſcovered ſome failings that we ſhould not have expected in an Apoſtle, and eſpecially in one ſo much diſtinguiſhed for his meekneſs and love. What other concluſion can we draw, than this, "Let no man glory in men * ?"

On a certain occaſion, whilſt Jeſus inculcated humility, John ſeemed to be convinced of acting unſuitably to his temper; at leaſt, he deſired to know, whether his conduct had been conſiſtent. He obſerved, that he and ſome other of the diſciples had ſeen a perſon caſting out devils in the name of Chriſt, and forbidden him to proſecute that ſervice, merely becauſe he belonged not to their company †. This, evidently, betrayed a narrowneſs and bigotry of mind, and, as it deſerved, met with a reproof. The admonition, which was now delivered, teaches us, that thoſe, who profeſs a real regard to, and dependence on, the Saviour, and who promote his cauſe, ought not to be raſhly cenſured or diſcouraged, though they aſſociate not with us, and though in ſome reſpects they differ from our ſentiments. Alas! there are few, who poſſeſs that extenſive liberality, which our religion calls for. Are we not all prone to condemn ſuch, as accord not exactly with our ſyſtem, and comply not with our forms, even where we are forced to acknowledge, that they

* 1 Cor. iii. 21. † Mar. ix. 38—40. Luke ix. 49, 50.

obey the ſame Maſter, and exert themſelves for the ſubverſion of Satan's kingdom?

Upon our Lord's journey to Jeruſalem, certain Samaritans refuſed to entertain him, through their hatred of the Jewiſh nation*. John and his brother conſidered this inſolent treatment as deſerving of the ſevereſt puniſhment, and propoſed, after the example of Elijah, to call down upon the offenders fire from heaven. Doubtleſs, they acted under the habitual influence of love to Chriſt and zeal for his name, yet at that time they were inſtigated by reſentment and a warmth of paſſion, which cannot be juſtified. Jeſus, therefore, ſharply rebuked their raſhneſs and impetuoſity, as inconſiſtent with the nature of his religion and the benevolent object of his miſſion. "The Son of man is not come to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them." And ſhall his followers be furious and vindictive, or purſue their adverſaries with bitter execrations? Will any inſults or injuries vindicate ſuch a temper? Will you plead, under a vehemence of this ſort, that you are actuated by a pure regard to God and his truth? Alas! you deceive yourſelves: "ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of." Far different are the weapons, which you ſhould uſe in contending againſt infidels and heretics. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God †." O ſtudy the genius of the Goſpel, and the tendency of its principles! Is not its main deſign to promote peace and ſalvation? And has not the great Founder of your faith exhibited an aſtoniſhing

* Luke ix. 51—56. † James i. 20.

example

example of forgiveneſs and kindneſs to enemies? How, then, does it appear, that you have learned Chriſt, while you burn with reſentment and indignation?

The warmth of our Apoſtle upon this occaſion muſt be aſcribed, in part at leaſt, to his prejudice againſt the Samaritans, whom he had been taught to hate from his youth. He had often ſeen his Maſter inſulted, and treated with greater contumely by the Scribes and Phariſees; and yet he had never expreſſed a wiſh to call down fire upon them. So great is the force of education! Still, it muſt be allowed, the furious propoſal, coming from one of ſo ſweet a diſpoſition as St. John, is perfectly unaccountable, except we acknowledge the corrupt ſtate of human nature, even in the regenerate. Thus, alſo, it appears, that many of the ſaints of God, in certain circumſtances of temptation, have acted in direct oppoſition to thoſe habits and tempers, for which they are moſt diſtinguiſhed. When we read of intemperance in Noah, anger in Moſes, impatience in Job, cowardice in Peter; ſhall we wonder, that ſome ſparks of reſentment remained even in John? Let us beware for ourſelves, and conſider by what principles we are influenced: "He that truſteth in his own heart, is a fool *."

We are obliged to take notice of another inſtance, in which the luſtre of this eminent character was obſcured. When our Lord was travelling to Jeruſalem for the laſt time, and had juſt foretold his approaching

* Prov. xxviii. 26.

paſſion, the Apoſtles James and John preferred a petition, through the mediation of their mother, that they might be appointed to the higheſt poſts in his kingdom *. The requeſt aroſe from their carnal notions of the Meſſiah's erecting a temporal dominion, and evidently ſavoured of an ambitious ſpirit. It was particularly ſtrange and prepoſterous, that they ſhould lay their ſchemes for worldly advancement, when informed that their Maſter was about to ſuffer the utmoſt extremity. A reproof was neceſſary; and accordingly the Saviour reprehended them, though with peculiar mildneſs. "Ye know not," ſaid he, "what ye aſk." Ah! how often do we come under this condemnation! Through the prevalence of wrong affections "we aſk amiſs;" and God in great mercy refuſes to grant our ſupplications.

Jeſus enquired of them, "Are ye able to drink of the cup, that I ſhall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptiſm, that I am baptized with?" Or in other words, "Can you take part with me in thoſe tremendous afflictions, which I am going to endure?" They did not wiſh to decline the moſt painful ſervice; but it was probably ignorance and ſelf-confidence, which dictated the reply, "We are able." He warned them to expect the ſevere conflict, and obſerved, that the diſpoſal of future honours muſt be left to the ſovereign pleaſure of God. Agreeably to this prediction, they were honoured with a ſhare in their Maſter's ſufferings: John with bonds, ſtripes, impriſonment, and exile; and James with a ſpeedy martyrdom.

* Matt. xx. 17—23. Mar. x. 32—40. Luke xviii. 31—34.

Chriſtians,

Christians, you perceive from this example, that though in the sincerity of your hearts you have relinquished all for the Gospel's sake, you may still be tempted to entertain improper thoughts and desires through covetousness or ambition. Can you so boast of your own strength, as to suppose yourselves incapable of being actuated by any carnal motives? Rather, do you not feel such corrupt affections, as cover you with confusion, and almost overwhelm you with distress? This part of our history may afford you some relief. We do not vindicate, what is in any measure opposite to a holy, spiritual frame of mind. But it may still encourage your hope to observe, that those, who were dear to God and eminent in his service, sometimes betrayed strange inconsistencies. Let the subject, however, produce real humiliation, and excite you to constant circumspection. Being apprized of your danger, you should implore assistance.

There are those, who seem to exult in the failings of good men, as if they proved the whole system of religion to be a cheat and delusion. But how unfair, as well as impious, is such a conduct! We allow, that even the Apostles felt some degree of prejudice, ambition, and resentment: but does this concession detract from the general excellence of their character? On the contrary, does not true candour require us to say, that they have evinced their integrity, by declaring their own defects?

Will you maintain, that, because the saints of God are not perfect, you, who resolutely persevere in the practice of sin, are as safe as they? Is there not an

essential

essential difference? Their habitual aim and delight is to do the will of God; your's, to gratify your corrupt nature, in opposition to Him. They are humbled and grieved for their failures in duty; you justify a continual system of transgression, and imitate them only in those things, which they deeply lament, and consider as a disgrace to their profession. How totally dissimilar! The comparison cannot flatter your pride: it shews the odiousness of your prevailing temper, and the danger, to which your souls are exposed.

Jesus reproved the improper desires of his beloved disciple, but did not withdraw his kindness. John still remained his constant attendant, and most intimate friend. He was sent in company with Peter to prepare the passover *: and during the last solemn celebration of that festival, it is remarked, that John leaned on the bosom of his dear Lord; that is, according to their posture at table, he sat the nearest †. In that place, which was granted him as a token of peculiar affection, he could propose questions, unperceived by the rest: and accordingly, having asked, who was the traitor, he first received the intimation, that Judas was the man.

St. John was admitted into the garden of Gethsemane, at the time when the Saviour, retiring for secret prayer, endured his tremendous agony ‡. There also, like Peter and James, this favoured Apostle betrayed a very sinful remissness, and spent in sleep the precious moments, which ought to have been improved in holy watchfulness and fervent devotion. It is acknow-

* Luke xxii. 8. † John xiii. 23—26. ‡ Matt. xxvi. 36—46.

ledged,

ledged, too, that, when his Lord was apprehended, he, as well as the other disciples, forsook him and fled, in violation of the most solemn promises *. Yet, being soon recovered from his fears, he followed him to the place of trial, and stood there a silent witness of the contempt and cruelty, with which he was treated.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, exposed to all the insults and outrage of the people, John had the fortitude to continue by him, even to the last, and, probably, was the only Apostle, who did so †. His constancy and fidelity were well compensated. His dying Master looked on him and gave him a signal token of regard. He requested his dear mother to consider this beloved disciple as her own son, and commended her also, in her disconsolate state, to the care of John. There is at all times, a claim in wretchedness to protection and relief. But the present was a peculiar affliction, exciting peculiar sympathies. The parent of the holy sufferer, in those moments, when every bequest is sacred, was committed to the Apostle, as a mother claiming his support. He acknowledged the obligation and the trust, received her to his house, and treated her with all filial tenderness and respect. Shall not we, likewise, learn to maintain a firm attachment to the Saviour, be mindful of his solemn injunctions, and esteem ourselves honoured in fulfilling them? Though we can shew no personal kindness to him or his parent, yet he has constituted the poor as his representatives, and intrusted them

* Matt. xxvi. 56. † John xix. 26, 27.

to

to us. Let none of his people refuſe or neglect the charge.

When Chriſt was riſen from the dead, our Apoſtle, accompanied by Peter, ran with eager haſte to examine the ſepulchre, upon the report of Mary Magdalene. It ſhould ſeem, that from his view of the place, and of the orderly diſpoſition of the burial clothes, he was the firſt who believed the important fact of the reſurrection *. On the evening of the ſame day, he was one of the aſſembly, to whom Jeſus appeared: but, probably, he was not favoured with any ſeparate viſion of him; nor could that be needful, if, as we ſuppoſe, his faith was ſufficiently confirmed. When fiſhing with certain diſciples on the ſea of Tiberias, he firſt recollected the perſon of his Lord, who called to them from the ſhore †. A remarkable interview enſued, at the cloſe of which we are ſtruck with one circumſtance, which evinced his humility, love, and zeal. When Peter received an injunction to attend the Saviour, John waited not for any ſuch expreſs direction, but inſtantly roſe up, as if eager to ſhew his attachment, and with ſilent meekneſs followed ‡. Let us examine, whether we poſſeſs a readineſs of this kind, to go after Chriſt, wherever he ſhall lead the way. When he is pleaſed to intimate his will, are there no heſitations, no delays, or miſgivings? Our conduct, more than our profeſſions, ſhould declare our deſire to enter on his ſervice.

The curioſity of Peter, reſpecting John's future

* John xx. 1—10. See Weſt on the Reſurrection. † John xxi. 1, &c. ‡ See Doddr. Expoſ. vol. ii. Sect. 201.

destination, was immediately checked by that singular reply; "If I will, that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" It was concluded from this expression, that the Apostle should not die: but the opinion arose from a mistaken interpretation. It seemed, however, to be implied, that he was designed to be spared in the Church, till the coming of Christ for the destruction of Jerusalem. The event, at least, was such: he was one of those, who did not taste of death, till the kingdom of God, in that awful dispensation, was accomplished *. Whatever changes may await us, let us leave ourselves and all our concerns to our Lord's disposal. Only let us follow him without reserve, as did this man of God, and endeavour to employ our time usefully and honourably, whether a longer or a shorter space may yet remain.

After the ascension of Christ, St. John appeared more conspicuous, and, probably, shone with greater splendour, than before. He is described, as continuing in holy fellowship with his brethren, resolutely adhering to the cause of his Master, amidst formidable dangers, boldly and vigorously pursuing the grand objects of his sacred function. On the day of Pentecost, he, together with the other Apostles, received the miraculous effusion of the Spirit, and was employed in gathering in the remarkable harvest, when three thousand souls were converted. He is exhibited to our notice, as the companion of St. Peter in many of his labours and persecutions. They two were going up to worship at the temple, when the lame man attracted

* Matt. xvi. 28.

their

their benevolent regard, and experienced their power of healing *. They were preaching to the people, when the priests and rulers apprehended them, and cast them into prison †. With undaunted courage they stood together before the council, despised their threatenings, and expressed a firm determination "to obey God rather than men." Again they were thrust into a dungeon, and rescued by an Angel ‡. Being scourged and menaced, they rejoiced in the honour, to which they were called, "and daily in the temple, and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

St. John, likewise, was commissioned as the associate of Peter, to go down from Jerusalem to confirm the young converts in Samaria §. There they imparted spiritual gifts, and declared the tidings of peace and salvation through the Redeemer's name, in many towns and villages. The chief residence of our Apostle was at Jerusalem, where St. Paul distinguished him as one of the main pillars of the church ‖. But after some time he removed to Ephesus, and thence took his circuits for the promulgation of the Gospel in Asia, "labouring in word and doctrine," and establishing many Christian societies ┿. At length, when the Roman Emperor Domitian raised a violent persecution, it is said that John was sent to Rome, that he might be put to death, and, being plunged into a caldron of boiling oil, came out unhurt. Whether or no that tradition be well founded, he was banished to

* Acts iii. 1, &c. † iv. 1, &c. ‡ v. 17, &c. § viii. 14—25.
‖ Gall. ii. 9. ┿ See Cave's Lives of the Apostles.

Patmos,

Patmos, a ſmall iſland in the Egean ſea, condemned, as he himſelf affirms, "for the word of God, and for the teſtimony of Jeſus Chriſt *." In that dreary ſituation he continued for nearly two years, and then, upon Domitian's deceaſe, returned to his charge at Epheſus, where he long remained a bleſſing to the church, a faithful witneſs and ſtrenuous advocate for the truth of the Goſpel.

It is recorded, that at a very advanced age, being unable to walk or preach, he was conſtantly carried to the public aſſemblies, and there exhorted the people by that ſhort ſentence, ſo expreſſive of his general ſpirit, "My little children, let us love one another." At laſt, though in his life he had ſuffered ſeverer agonies than the pains of martyrdom, he died in peace, having been wonderfully preſerved from violence, for the benefit of others, till he had attained almoſt a hundred years.

Let us admire and praiſe the grace of God, exhibited in this eminent Apoſtle, and conſider our obligations to imitate his example. There are thoſe, perhaps, who plead, that they are not called to the ſame high function. But do you, therefore, juſtify your carnal affections and purſuits? Or do you think it allowable, in a private ſituation, to be proud, ſelfiſh, indolent, and revengeful? If you profeſs Chriſtianity, you ought to be followers of St. John, ſo far as to manifeſt ſimilar diſpoſitions. In your place, and according to your meaſure, you ſhould be kind and gentle, bold and active, faithful and perſevering in the ſervice of Chriſt.

* Rev. i. 9.

But

But if the corrupt desires of the flesh predominate in your minds, if you love the world and the things of the world, if you are ashamed of, or averse to, the exercises of devotion, your pretences to religion are vain.

Our Apostle lived to see the Gospel propagated to a large extent, yea, through the greater part of the known world. But he beheld, also, the corruption, as well as the increase, of the Christian Church. Many pernicious errors were, even in that early age, broached and disseminated, relating to the person of the Redeemer: among other false doctrines, that was the chief, which denied his Divinity. An opinion so dangerous could not but excite the notice and grief of this venerable preacher of the faith: and accordingly, in the ardour of his love to God and men, he set himself to oppose it with firmness. "This," said he, "is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof you have heard, that it should come, and even now already is it in the world *." Ought we not to lament, that ancient heresies are revived in the present day, and threaten to deluge our land? Or shall we be indifferent about the consequence? Is it of no importance, in what light the Saviour is regarded? Whether he be worshipped and adored as God over all, or degraded into a mere man like ourselves? Where is our fidelity, where our zeal for the truth?

* 1 John iv. 3. See Dr. Horsley's Charge and Letters, in which it is proved, that St. John's assertions were expresly levelled against those who denied the Deity of Christ, as well as against them, who allowed not his humanity.

We

We bleſs God for the writings of the Apoſtle, which will enable us to reſiſt and confute the erroneous and deſtructive repreſentations of perverſe and ungodly men. He was honoured in being employed as one of the ſacred authors of the New Teſtament: and, while we confeſs that "all ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God," and claims our regard, we perceive a peculiar ſweetneſs, ſpirituality, and ſublimity in St. John's compoſitions. Probably for the clear and comprehenſive revelations, with which he was favoured, the profound myſteries, which he has delivered, and the heavenly manner, in which he has treated them, he has been called the Divine.

His Goſpel was publiſhed after all the others, not only for the purpoſe of recording many things, which they had omitted, but with an eſpecial view to oppoſe the hereſies of the Gnoſtics, and to aſſert the Godhead of Chriſt. He introduces the hiſtory with an elevated preface, in which he has explicitly declared the excellency and Deity of his Maſter; and he relates many of thoſe wonderful diſcourſes, which prove and diſplay the ſupreme perfections of Jeſus. He bears a decided teſtimony, even towards the cloſe of life, not only that the Word, which was made fleſh, originally was with God and was God, but alſo that he himſelf "beheld his glory," and "received of his fulneſs *." Let us pray for more enlarged conceptions of "the great myſtery of godlineſs;" and, as we advance in the knowledge and love of Chriſt, theſe

* John i. 1—16.

authentic memorials will become more and more precious in our estimation.

The Epistles of St. John discover the distinguishing part of his character. Must not every reader acknowledge, that the inspired author breathed nothing but love? And is not this allowed to be the peculiar badge of our profession? Yet alas! we lament that contrary dispositions prevail in the Christian world. What confusion is produced among us by envy, strife, and revenge? We would, therefore, enforce the exhortations of the Apostle: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God: He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love *." According to this decision, but few have attained the right knowledge of the Gospel, and those, who have made the greatest progress, have yet much more to learn.

The sublime and mysterious book of the Revelations was written by St. John during his banishment in the isle of Patmos. The Lord God vouchsafed to favour him with singular visions and discoveries, and to place him, as it were, on the verge of heaven, when excluded from human society. The counsels of Jehovah, respecting future ages, were declared to him: and these he has faithfully recorded. Here, then, is exhibited a series of prophecy, which unfolds the grand schemes of Providence, even to the end of the world. May we read and contemplate with holy reverence and admiration!

* 1 John iv. 7, 8.

The

The glories of the celeſtial ſtate were, in ſome meaſure, diſcloſed to the Apoſtle's view. He ſaw the throne of God, and heard the high praiſes of the Redeemer, which are continually chanted by innumerable myriads of ſaints and Angels. No other part of the Bible contains ſuch exalted deſcriptions of God and his kingdom, as this inſpired book. Do they not excite wonder, love, and joy? Should we not exult in the proſpect of that felicity, which is here brought before us? Or, can we be content with that poor, ſordid ſatisfaction, which the earth affords? Rather, are we not wearied and diſguſted with its beſt poſſeſſions? And do we not long to join "the glorious company of the Apoſtles," who are now admitted into the beatific preſence of God? We dare not ſay, who out of this number is accounted firſt in dignity: but we preſume, that He, who by way of eminence was ſtyled "the diſciple whom Jeſus loved," is placed near to his adorable Lord.

However bright were the views of St. John in this life, yet they were comparatively faint and obſcure. He ſaw "through a glaſs darkly;" but now he ſees "face to face *." Now he is favoured with clearer and larger diſcoveries of the glory of God and the myſtery of redemption: and now he better underſtands the excellency of "the holy Jeruſalem," in which is "the throne of God and of the Lamb †." That exalted ſtate is prepared, not for the Apoſtles only, but, as we truſt, for many among ourſelves. Do you aſpire to that high honour? You muſt poſſeſs a meetneſs for it: you muſt

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12. † Rev. xxii. 3.

have the ſeal of God in your foreheads; you muſt waſh your robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb *. Like St. John, cultivate an intercourſe with Jeſus, and apply for freſh communications out "of his fulneſs," even "grace for grace †." Be willing to labour and to ſuffer for him, till you finiſh your courſe on earth, and then you ſhall ſhortly join with Prophets and Apoſtles in that elevated ſong, "Bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever ‡." Amen.

* Rev. vii. 3, 14. † John i. 16. ‡ Rev. v. 13.

HEROD ANTIPAS.

CHAP. VII.

Herod Antipas, his rank and character—his incestuous marriage—imprisoned John Baptist—yet revered him—heard him gladly—and made a partial reformation—was restrained from destroying him, through fear of the people—at length beheaded him—was afraid of his being raised from the dead—threatened Jesus—examined and insulted him—died in exile.

HUMAN nature will be found the ſame, under all the variety of circumſtances, in which it can be placed. If, therefore, we compare paſt and preſent times, or take a view of different ſituations in life, we may expect that ſimilar characters will occur to our obſervation. But, while we remark, in what reſpects others have failed, or by what temptations they have been overcome, may we be warned from their examples, and avoid thoſe ſnares, which have already proved ſo fatal!

One of exalted rank is now introduced to our notice; yet, poſſibly, a near reſemblance of him may be traced in perſons of a lower condition. It is Herod, ſurnamed Antipas, of whom certain particulars are related by the Evangeliſts. He was the ſon of that

Herod, called the Great, who ſought the deſtruction of the infant Saviour, and maſſacred the children at Bethlehem. This man poſſeſſed only a part of his father's dominions, over which he preſided merely as the vicegerent of the Roman Emperor, with the title of Tetrarch or King of Galilee. Hiſtorians are agreed, that he was a prince of licentious and abandoned conduct, of which, indeed, ſufficient proofs are given. We ſhall confine ourſelves to thoſe circumſtances, which the ſcriptures have recorded: and, agreeably to this ſhort account, he will appear to have oppoſed the moſt ſolemn warnings and ſtrong convictions, and ſacrificed every principle to the gratification of his luſt. May we be aware of our own danger, and learn to reſtrain thoſe ſenſual deſires, "which war againſt the ſoul!"

Herod had divorced his own wife, and joined himſelf to another by an adulterous and inceſtuous connection: he had married the wife of his brother Philip, after having baſely ſeduced her from her huſband. This led to various enormities, and produced complicated troubles. John the Baptiſt, being ſent for to Herod's court, probably from motives of curioſity, perceived, and dared not to connive at, the ſinful practices of the king. The preacher ſought not his favour, and feared not his diſpleaſure. As a bold advocate for God, not "having reſpect to perſons," he brought a heavy charge of guilt againſt the royal hearer, and reprehended him with fidelity and plainneſs, "for all the evils which he had done *." This was not a ge-

* Matt. xiv. 3—5. Mar. vi. 17—20. Luke iii. 19, 20.

neral

neral invective againſt his immoralities: a particular application was made to his conſcience, for the continued commiſſion of adultery and inceſt. John declared his connection with Herodias to be highly criminal, and called upon him to put away the woman, with whom the laws both of God and man forbad him to cohabit.

What was the effect of this honeſt addreſs? Alas! reproofs are ſeldom well received. Do not moſt perſons riſe with anger againſt him, who is ſo much their friend as to tell them of their faults? What, then, could be expected from an imperious and licentious prince? There are few, who dare to rebuke ſin in a palace: it is the unhappy prerogative of dignity, to be conſidered as above control. Thoſe, who poſſeſs an exalted ſtation, are apt to ſpurn with indignation at any reſtraint, which an inferior, and eſpecially a preacher, may attempt to impoſe. But reſentment, on ſuch occaſions, is not confined to kings: we perceive that many in lower life are incapable of bearing any ſharp reprehenſion. Have we not been diſpleaſed with the faithful admonitions of a companion or miniſter? Have we not deſired to hear no more of ſuch unpleaſant ſubjects, and, inſtead of profiting by the ſerious counſel, meditated revenge againſt its author? But, ſurely, we are our own enemies, when we quarrel with thoſe, who from pure benevolence point out to us "all the evils which we have done," and charge us to relinquiſh, what we cannot lawfully retain.

Herod was enraged, and his officers were immedi-

ately commiſſioned to bind and impriſon the Baptiſt. It is remarked, that he "added yet this above all," as if it were the greateſt of all his enormities, "that he ſhut up John in priſon." The perſecution of God's ſervants, for the upright and zealous performance of their duty, is an offence peculiarly heinous: and He, whoſe cauſe they plead, will avenge the injury. The oppoſition, as in the caſe before us, generally ariſes from the uneaſineſs, which ſinners feel, upon a bold and unreſerved repreſentation of their guilt and danger. O that their anger were turned againſt themſelves, and not againſt their reprover; that they would endeavour, not to ſilence him, but to reform their own evil conduct! If Herod had underſtood his true happineſs or intereſt, he would have embraced John as his beſt friend; and the miniſtry of that good man might have been continued for a much longer period.

Yet there were ſome favourable appearances in Herod; and it may ſeem a matter of wonder, that the ſtrong convictions, which he felt, were ſo tranſient or inefficacious. His adulterous queen was more incenſed than he, and, from the firſt, wiſhed to deſtroy the Baptiſt. Probably, ſhe apprehended, that, through the preacher's admonitions, ſhe ſhould loſe her influence, and be diſmiſſed with diſgrace. She, therefore, urged the king not merely to impriſon but to kill him, that they might no longer be troubled with his inſolence. To this propoſal, however, Herod would not yield an immediate compliance: he was reſtrained by a powerful impreſſion upon his mind. "He feared John, knowing that he

was

was a juſt man, and an holy." This circumſtance demands our attention. The Lord God put an honour upon his faithful ſervant, and made him reſpectable in chains, even before the moſt enraged enemies. Such a power very frequently accompanies eminent examples of godlineſs. It keeps in awe, and often terrifies, the perſons, who are diſpoſed to perſecute. Herod was ſtruck with reverence for the man, whom he had caſt into a dungeon, and, under the view of John's ſingular holineſs, probably perceived his own baſeneſs, ſo as to be diſtreſſed with painful apprehenſions.

The priſoner, it ſhould ſeem, was not afraid of the king. What have thoſe to dread, who have the Lord Jehovah on their ſide? They poſſeſs a never-failing ſource of confidence and joy, and may, therefore, exult in defiance of their moſt violent oppoſers, though racks and tortures be prepared for their deſtruction. Be of good courage, you who follow the Lamb, and be "not terrified by your adverſaries," whatever ſtrength or authority they may boaſt of. They themſelves, perhaps, may be inwardly diſmayed, at the very time when they appear moſt formidable. That furious prince and perſecutor, "Saul, was afraid of David, becauſe the Lord was with him *." Only let your enemies perceive in you a conſiſtent and exemplary conduct; and then, however they may affect to reproach, they cannot really deſpiſe you. We may appeal to them, if there is not one or another, whom they diſlike for his religion, and yet

* 1 Sam. xviii. 12.

cannot

cannot look at without a ſecret awe and terror on their minds, " knowing him to be a juſt man and an holy." At ſome times it appears, that under this impreſſion, they would relinquiſh every worldly enjoyment, if they might exchange conditions. O that they would yield to their own convictions, drop their oppoſition againſt thoſe, whom in their conſciences they believe to be the objects of divine regard, and cordially join with them in zealous exertions for the cauſe of God and his truth!

Herod was not merely reſtrained from violence, by a reverence for the Baptiſt; it ſhould ſeem, that he liſtened to his inſtructions, even after his impriſonment. Probably he ſent for him, as Felix did for Paul *, " and communed with him." We conclude, alſo, that he paid attention to his doctrine; for it is expreſsly ſaid, that he " obſerved him," and, what is ſtill more remarkable, that he " heard him gladly." On certain occaſions, at leaſt, his affections were much moved: he could not but commend and admire the honeſty of the preacher, and perhaps would have ſhewn no reſentment, if one particular ſubject had been avoided.

Some may enquire, How can perſons, of ſuch a character as Herod, receive any pleaſure from the plain and faithful declarations of God's word? Poſſibly, the ſpeaker may be approved; his abilities, addreſs, or elocution may excite notice and applauſe, even where the principles he maintains, and the practical exhortations he delivers, are not regarded. The

* Acts xxiv. 26.

novelty,

novelty, importance, and ſublimity of the things chiefly inſiſted on, may ſeem for a time to entertain and intereſt the hearers, who may, therefore, be induced to take great pains in frequenting the divine ordinances. This may be the caſe, where no ſpiritual affections are exerciſed, where the grand peculiarities of the Goſpel are not underſtood, and no effectual application made to the conſcience. O beware of reſting in ſuch a ſuperficial attendance! Think it not enough to diſtinguiſh truth from error, or to diſcover a fervour of zeal for right doctrines: be not ſatisfied in feeling admiration and delight, while the awful myſteries of redemption are exhibited, and "good tidings of great joy" are announced. If you experience no godly ſorrow for ſin, no warm attachment to the Saviour, no renovation of heart by the Spirit; the ſermons, which you hear, may afford you entertainment, but will not promote your ſalvation.

This is indeed a tremendous caſe; and yet it has frequently occurred. Of ſuch auditors the Lord God thus warned the prophet Ezekiel: "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely ſong of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well on an inſtrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not *." Many of like deſcription attended on the Saviour. Multitudes of men and women expreſſed ſuch delight in liſtening to his doctrine, that they travelled after him with much wearineſs and expenſe: yet many of them entirely forſook him; and ſome, who had, probably, ſung hoſanna to his name, ſoon afterwards cried

* Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

out with extreme malignity, "Crucify him, crucify him." John the Baptist had other hearers of this sort, besides Herod, who, as our Lord testified, "were willing for a season to rejoice in his light *." At first, they were so struck with his solemn declarations of the Messiah's approach, as to be transported with wonder and joy. But, when he boldly reproved their iniquitous conduct, and called them to the practice of mortification, they basely calumniated his ministry, and exclaimed, "He hath a devil †."

Herod, however, advanced farther than merely expressing an admiration of the preacher; he was roused to action, and attempted a reformation. Convinced of the necessity of a change, "he did many things," relinquished many of his evil habits, and applied himself to the performance of various duties. This appeared promising indeed. But Herodias was still retained: he would not renounce his connection with that infamous woman; and thus he betrayed the unsoundness of his heart. The real convert rests not in a partial amendment of life: he will abhor and forsake one sin as well as another, and yield a sincere and uniform regard to every known precept. If, then, under the awakening influence of the word of God, you profess to be penitents, examine faithfully whether you are "new creatures." Has an universal renovation been produced? Are you determined, by divine grace, to put away all ungodliness? Have you made no reserve? Do you plead for no exception? Is there not a "sin, which easily besets you,"

* John v. 35. † Luke vii. 33.

and to which, from your constitution or situation, you are most exposed? Is this, what you are willing to abandon? This is, more than any other, the Herodias, which must be divorced: for, if the favourite passion still retain its ascendency, where is your deliverance from the love and power of iniquity?

Perhaps, there is no carnal affection more ensnaring, or more generally fatal, than lust. To what horrible ravages has it given rise? Many have been gradually allured by it from one transgression to another, till they have been led into such enormities of conduct, as they once thought themselves incapable of committing. What will not men sacrifice to the gratification of their libidinous desires? They will disregard their interest, health, and reputation, violate the strongest ties and engagements, despise every admonition, oppose their own convictions, and, even while they feel the worth of their immortal souls, obstinately plunge into final perdition. What a grievous infatuation is this! Herod is but one, out of thousands, who will have to lament for ever a fond attachment to a shameless woman. How just is that description of the adulteress: "She hath cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death *."

Let us mark the event with the king of Galilee. Highly as he reverenced the Baptist, he was at length persuaded to consent to his death, probably through the importunate entreaties of Herodias. Yet, for a

* Prov. vii. 26, 27.

time,

time, he was prevented from proceeding to any act of violence. "He feared the people," who universally regarded John as a prophet, and might have raised a general sedition, to avenge his murder. What? did he not fear to wound his own conscience, to shed innocent blood, provoke the fierce anger of the Lord, and destroy his precious soul? No: but he dreaded the resentment of a mob. A poor motive indeed! Yet it is well for society, that sinners are, in any way, restrained from effecting their purposes. Frequently, when good principles fail, some mercenary, worldly considerations have a strong influence. Thus one evil passion keeps down another; and no persons, perhaps, feel themselves at liberty to do all that is in their hearts. Were it otherwise, the utmost confusion would prevail, and, such is our hatred of true religion, the Church itself would be soon extirpated. How wonderful is the government, which is maintained over the human race!

After some time, however, an occasion offered, for the accomplishment of Herodias's wish. In an hour of temptation she carried her point: the compliant king was induced to give up his objections. At a splendid banquet, prepared for the celebration of his birthday, when the daughter of his queen had danced before him and his nobles with great applause, he declared with an oath, that he would grant her some mark of his favour, whatever she would ask, though it were the half of his dominion *. This was an instance of extreme rashness, and produced

* Matt. xiv. 6—11. Mar. vi. 21—28.

the moſt terrible effects. Alas! what can we expect from entertainments, which are calculated to inflame and gratify the paſſions? The young woman was perſuaded by her mother to claim the head of John the Baptiſt, who had excited her reſentment. How ſtrange the propoſal! But a vindictive mind will give up every conſideration, for the ſake of wreaking its vengeance on an enemy.

Herod himſelf appeared to be ſtruck with horror at the thought of perpetrating the atrocious deed, and yet had not firmneſs enough to reſiſt. However his conſcience might remonſtrate, he determined not to exaſperate Herodias by a refuſal, and argued abſurdly, that, unleſs he complied, he would be deſpiſed by his nobility for weakneſs and inconſtancy. He conſented, therefore, to the requeſt, though with viſible reluctance, and inſtantly commanded the head of the Lord's prophet to be ſevered from the body and introduced into the company, as an object, probably, of their profane ſport and contemptuous ridicule. Yet, if we make a right eſtimate of things, we ſhall be diſpoſed to envy the condition of the Baptiſt, expiring by the hand of violence, rather than that of Herod, exalted upon a throne of iniquity.

It ſhould ſeem, the king pretended a regard to veracity in this baſe tranſaction: he was unwilling to violate his oath. What vile diſſimulation was this! To avoid the charge of perjury, he committed a murder of peculiar enormity. No declarations, however confirmed by an oath, could have bound him to act in direct oppoſition to the cleareſt commands

of

of God. It was his indiſpenſable duty to depart from the promiſe, and repent of the raſhneſs, from which it proceeded. Probably, the pretext was falſe. He perpetrated the crime, not to ſatisfy his conſcience, but to preſerve his credit among the courtiers, to ſilence the importunate clamours of his queen, and perhaps with a view of procuring eaſe to himſelf, by removing ſo troubleſome a reprover.

Here we remark the ruinous tendency and progreſs of ſin. The gratification of luſt iſſued in murder; and, we fear, it is no uncommon event. When men abandon themſelves to the indulgence of their ſenſual deſires, no bounds will be ſufficient to reſtrain them. They may be hurried from one baſe action to another, and be determined to perſevere, even while they themſelves recoil at every ſtep they take. Let us beware of yielding to thoſe ſolicitations, which will be encouraged by our compliance to increaſe their demands upon us, and may produce the moſt tremendous conſequences. We may be exaſperated by the rebukes of a faithful monitor, and induced to adopt ſome violent meaſures againſt him. But, though we ſhould ſucceed in that point, ſtill we may not be able to ſin without reſtraint: we may carry about with us an inward tormentor, and, like Paſhur, become a terror to ourſelves *.

Herod was freed from John's reproofs, and perſiſted in his iniquity; but he could not forget that innocent blood had been ſhed, and under that conviction was rendered miſerable. Some time after-

* Jer. xx. 3. 4.

ward,

ward, having heard remarkable accounts of Jeſus, he was filled with perplexing fears, leſt this ſhould be the very perſon now reſtored to life, whom he had beheaded. Did the oppreſſor expect the retaliation of his cruelty; the murderer, the approach of an avenger? It ſhould ſeem, the remembrance of the Baptiſt haunted him as a continual accuſer. How powerful is the voice of conſcience? Amidſt all the pomps of a palace, it will ſpeak, and make the king upon his throne tremble. The mind of Herod could not be quieted by all the blandiſhments of his amorous queen, nor by his own libertine principles. He is generally ſuppoſed to have embraced the Sadducean notion of the ſoul's mortality, and to have diſbelieved a reſurrection. But, in the preſent caſe, he could not act the infidel: recollecting the violence he had committed, he was troubled by the apprehenſion of John's returning to life. Let us learn to reverence that monitor, which we feel within us; for, if we attend not to its dictates in due ſeaſon, it may prove a ſevere tormentor.

The uneaſineſs of Herod had no good effect. As he afterwards threatened to deſtroy Jeſus, it is obvious, that he remained an "enemy of all righteouſneſs." Our Lord deſpiſed his menaces, and, in reply calling him a Fox, has juſtified the concluſion, that the king poſſeſſed the ſubtle and voracious diſpoſition of that wild and deteſted animal*. It was the ſame Herod, before whom the Saviour ſtood arraigned as a criminal, juſt before his crucifixion †. He was glad of the opportunity to examine ſo remarkable a priſoner; but his

* Luke xiii. 31, 32. † Luke xxiii. 7—12.

motive was no better than a curious desire of seeing some miracle performed by this worker of wonders. He proposed a variety of questions, to which Jesus returned no answer. Our Lord well knew his character, what opportunities of information he had neglected, what convictions he had resisted, and therefore refused to afford him any further instructions. This circumstance conveys a solemn admonition. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation *." The gracious offers, which are yet made, if contemptuously rejected, may never be repeated.

Unhappy Herod! Had he been properly affected, even then, with a sense of his condition; had he possessed an honest, humble, teachable disposition, that interview with the Saviour would have been a blessing indeed. But, as the case stood, it tended only to aggravate his guilt and condemnation. He treated the Lord Christ with insolent contempt, as if his pretensions to royalty were absurd in the extreme. He "set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate." Those two unrighteous governors, who had been at variance, were reconciled on that occasion, and then, probably, joined their counsels together, in opposition to the Redeemer. It is not uncommon for sinners, who are incensed against each other, to lay aside their private quarrels and party distinctions, that they may unite with greater force against the Gospel. O Lord, "Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together *."

At last the judgment of God overtook this proud offender. He suffered such a total defeat in battle from Aretas, king of Arabia, whose daughter he had married and divorced, that the Jews themselves considered it as the effect of divine vengeance upon him, for the murder of John the Baptist †. He was afterwards driven from his high station with disgrace, and both he and his adulterous queen died in exile at Lyons in Gaul.

Such was Herod: but now, turning our attention to ourselves, let us enquire, What is our own character? Will any persons undertake to justify the licentious conduct, which is here exhibited? Sinners, do you not perceive the ruinous tendency of your evil passions? What fruit have you received, or are you likely to receive? Is not the faithful servant of Christ, under all his contempt and persecution, more truly honourable and happy than the king of Galilee? And if we look beyond the present scene, how tremendous a prospect opens upon all those, "that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ‡!" O "repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin §!" "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world ‖." "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ⊥."

* Acts iv. 27. † Josephus. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 8. § Ezek. xviii. 30. ‖ John i. 29. ⊥ iii. 16.

SAINT STEPHEN.

CHAP. VIII.

Stephen, chosen a deacon—his faith and zeal—confounded certain disputants—arraigned before the Sanhedrim —shone with a miraculous lustre—entered on his defence—incensed the council—saw heaven opened—commended his soul to Jesus—prayed for his murderers—died—was buried and lamented.

In different ages the Church of Christ has struggled with extreme violence of opposition. This has tended to exhibit the enmity of the human heart against true religion; but it has, also, given occasion to the brightest displays of the power, love, and faithfulness of God in administering support and comfort to his suffering people. In the mean time, the Gospel has received abundant confirmation, while many have cheerfully endured contempt and tortures, and laid down their lives in its defence. May every reader be encouraged "to follow the Lamb" through severest difficulties, and learn from the present example to exercise prudence and meekness, as well as zeal and courage, in his service!

We are now called to contemplate the character of one, who imbibed much of the Saviour's spirit, trod

trod in his ſteps with ſingular firmneſs, and, after eminent uſefulneſs, obtained, before any others in the Chriſtian Church, the honourable crown of martyrdom. Amongſt that illuſtrious company, who have fought and bled in a glorious manner, for the teſtimony of Jeſus, none ſhines with greater ſplendour than Saint Stephen. In his dying behaviour, eſpecially, we perceive a rich aſſemblage of graces, which we ſhould keep in view for our own imitation.

He is introduced to our notice, as one of the ſeven firſt deacons at Jeruſalem. That the Apoſtles might be relieved from the care of the poor, and give themſelves entirely to the ſpiritual duties of their function, proper perſons were choſen for the regular and impartial diſtribution of the public money; though, it is preſumed, their attention was not confined merely to temporal concerns *. None, doubtleſs, were inveſted with this office, but ſuch as were of known integrity, piety, and diſcretion. The direction of the Apoſtles was, "Look ye out from among you ſeven men of honeſt report, full of the Holy Ghoſt and wiſdom, whom we may appoint over this buſineſs." Of this deſcription was Saint Stephen. He ſtands the foremoſt in the liſt, and, probably, ſurpaſſed the reſt in his gifts and attainments. "They choſe Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghoſt."

O how deſirable it is, that all the departments in the Church were occupied by perſons of ſimilar en-

* Acts vi. 1, &c.

 dowments!

dowments! Thoſe, who are not previouſly poſſeſſed of ſpiritual knowledge and experience, in private life, are not likely to diſcharge any public truſt with credit and advantage. Preferment generally proves a ſnare and a curſe to thoſe, who do not ſincerely devote themſelves to the ſervice of God, and exert their abilities, whatever they may be, for his glory: and ſuch caſes ſtamp reproach and infamy on our holy profeſſion. Let us pray, that God would raiſe up among us faithful witneſſes for his truth, and open the way for their admiſſion to thoſe ſacred functions, for which he is pleaſed to qualify them by his Spirit. Thus we may hope, that his work will be revived, and the general languor, which we now lament, ſucceeded by real fervour of devotion.

At the period, to which we here refer, we contemplate the Church in a proſperous ſtate. Its miniſters were all diligent and vigorous, and the conduct of its various members conſiſtent and honourable. Accordingly, as we might expect, "the word of God increaſed; and the number of the diſciples multiplied in Jeruſalem greatly." Their external circumſtances, alſo, were favourable. Gamaliel's advice had ſtopped the rage of perſecution for a ſeaſon. But the amazing propagation of the faith, through the zealous exertions of ſome principal characters, again excited a furious oppoſition. Such a man as St. Stephen, ſo laborious and uſeful in the ſervice, could not long remain unnoticed by the adverſaries: and at him eſpecially, as one ſtanding in the front of the battle, their envenomed darts were levelled.

"Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Having felt in himſelf the bleſſedneſs of the Goſpel, he could the more earneſtly recommend it to others. He preached with peculiar fervour, and confirmed his doctrines by the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which he poſſeſſed. Attempts were, therefore, made to confound and ſilence this zealous advocate for Chriſt.

Certain perſons, probably of diſtinguiſhed abilities and learning, from the different ſynagogues in Jeruſalem, attempted to oppoſe him by argument: and he was not backward to declare and maintain the truth before theſe ſubtle diſputants. In this conteſt he gained, through divine aſſiſtance, a decided victory. He ſpake by a wiſdom ſuperior to his own, which aſtoniſhed and irreſiſtibly overpowered his antagoniſts. They were baffled, and, though not driven from the field, obliged to change their mode of attack. When reaſoning failed, they tried the effect of ſlanderous and malicious invectives. Men, in general, are diſpoſed to miſrepreſent and revile, what they have in vain endeavoured to confute. Accuſations were ſought for, and perfidious wretches hired to aſſert a baſe calumny. The minds of the people were inflamed, and even the principal perſons of the city engaged in the oppoſition. Stephen was apprehended, and with rage and violence dragged before the grand council of the Sanhedrim. A ſhew of juſtice was preſerved: the priſoner was put upon his trial, and witneſſes called, who declared, "We have heard him ſpeak blaſphemous words againſt Moſes, and againſt God."

In ſupport of their accuſation it was alleged, that Stephen had predicted the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the temple, and a change of the Moſaic law, through the interpoſition of that Jeſus, whom he preached.

The charge was falſe: probably, he had not ſpoken all that was aſſerted, and the prediction itſelf, in its utmoſt extent, was far removed from blaſphemy or profaneneſs. He might have uſed certain expreſſions concerning the vengeance, which the Lord would execute upon them for their unbelief: and theſe they maliciouſly miſconſtrued and perverted, adding ſomewhat of their own, and inferring from them more than could juſtly be concluded. In the ſame way, the characters of religious perſons more frequently ſuffer by oblique inſinuations, unfair deductions, and wrong interpretations, than by direct lies. We need not be ſurpriſed, if, in our defence of the truth, our words be wilfully miſtaken, and "our good be evil ſpoken of." We owe it to the over-ruling influence of God's providence, wonderfully reſtraining the malevolence of his enemies, that we are at any time preſerved from the poiſonous attacks of falſe tongues. If we conſider, how ſoon our reputation, ſubſtance, liberty, or life itſelf might be taken away, only by "ſetting up falſe witneſſes," as in the caſe of Stephen, we ſhall ſee abundant reaſon to admire and praiſe the power and wiſdom of God, by which he keeps the world in awe.

The priſoner ſtood at the bar, and, the charge being brought, the eyes of the court were fixed upon him. And what did they behold? Were there any ſigns of guilt, any terror, or confuſion diſcoverable

in his countenance? No: they ſaw him, not only compoſed and undaunted, but filled with lively joy, and ſhining with a radiant brightneſs, like the luſtre which appeared in the face of Moſes, when he came down from the mount of God. This was more than the natural effect of a good conſcience, of a pure zeal for God, or an aſſurance of his love; though theſe will afford ſupport and comfort in extreme dangers. Here a miraculous, a divine ſplendour was diffuſed, which was a ſingular honour conferred upon St. Stephen, and which his enemies ought to have acknowledged as an evident token, that God was with him. They "ſaw his face, as it had been the face of an Angel," majeſtic and glorious. Were they not, then, ſo ſtruck with the phenomenon, as to deſiſt from the proſecution, "leſt they ſhould be found even to fight againſt God?" Alas! ſuch is the blindneſs and obduracy of the human heart, that no external evidence will, of itſelf, produce any proper, religious convictions: not the viſion of an Angel from heaven; nor the teſtimony of a miſerable ſpirit, if releaſed from its confinement in hell *.

Accordingly the court, diſregarding this uncommon appearance, proceeded in the trial, and the high prieſt, as preſident of the council, put the priſoner upon his defence †. Then Stephen ſpake in his own vindication. Yet perhaps, upon viewing the ſtrain of the holy advocate, we may view him as an orator, who brought rather than repelled an accuſation. More ſolicitous to ſave his audience, than procure his diſcharge, he

* Luke xvi. 31. † Acts vii. 1, &c.

he ſolemnly warned them not to reject the gracious propoſal of God by his faithful ſervants, as many of their foreſathers had done. We cannot here enlarge upon the different parts of this animated addreſs, which bears the cleareſt marks of profound wiſdom. He endeavoured to fix their attention by giving a ſhort detail of their hiſtory; and, while he ſhewed the various diſpenſations of mercy to their nation, the tendency of his diſcourſe was to deliver them from a blind attachment to their external privileges, their boaſted forms and ceremonies. He obſerved, that the Lord had called and bleſſed their anceſtors, before their law was publiſhed, or their temple built. Yet he expreſſed himſelf in ſuch terms both of their ritual and place of worſhip, as evinced his high veneration for them, and refuted the charge of blaſphemy, for which he had been arraigned. He proved, that the baſe ſpirit of oppoſition to God and his plans, which they then diſcovered, had appeared at different times among their progenitors, and intimated their danger of incurring a tremendous condemnation.

The ſermon is not to be conſidered as complete: it is only a part of what he ſeems to have intended, if they would have given him a patient hearing. But, probably, as he opened his deſign, they began to ſhew marks of violent commotion, ſo that he might perceive, from their countenances, a purpoſe of interrupting his diſcourſe. He endeavoured, therefore, to draw towards a concluſion, by making a warm and pointed application to his audience. He boldly charged them with imitating the perverſeneſs

neſs of the ancient Iſraelites, obſtinately reſiſting the Holy Ghoſt, murdering the very Saviour, whom their own prophets had foretold, and contemptuouſly violating that law, of which they boaſted. This was more than they could bear: "they were cut to the heart," not with godly ſorrow, as the converts on the day of Pentecoſt *, but with indignation and rage. They could not preſerve even an external decorum, through the violence of their reſentment; "they gnaſhed upon him with their teeth," like beaſts of prey, ready to tear and devour him.

St. Stephen, then, had nothing to expect, but immediate deſtruction: yet he remained undaunted. The Lord God conferred upon him a more ſignal honour, than before. Such abundant conſolations were adminiſtered to the poor perſecuted ſaint, as enabled him to be collected in the face of his furious enemies, though he ſeemed to lie at their mercy. The glories of the heavenly world were unfolded to his view, and he experienced within his enraptured ſoul a large meaſure of its bleſſedneſs. What a ſtriking contraſt is here exhibited between Him and his adverſaries! THEY felt diabolical tempers, which conſtitute a part of infernal miſery: HE, poſſeſſing peace and joy unſpeakable, exulted, as if he had been tranſlated into the immediate preſence of God. Under the full influence of the Holy Ghoſt, he diſregarded their rage, and looked up with fixed attention, as if he were appealing to the righteous Judge of all. He ſaw the ſplendour, which encircles the throne of God, and

* Acts ii. 37.

the Saviour himſelf ſtanding at the right hand of the divine Majeſty, engaged for his defence, and waiting to receive him.

The man of God, fired with a holy tranſport, and not attending to his own ſituation, declared the delightful viſion. The believer, when favoured with heavenly conſolations, may frequently be unable to conceal his emotions, and, without conſulting the dictates of worldly prudence, may call upon others to admire the greatneſs of his joy. But it is not probable, that ſinners will credit ſuch accounts, as accord not with their own experience. Thus the perſecutors of St. Stephen, ſo far from being convinced by his relation of the wondrous fact, were the more incenſed. Confirmed in their former opinion, they concluded that he was a blaſphemer, who ought not to be permitted to live. The council broke up in the utmoſt confuſion: they ſtopped their ears, that they might not be ſhocked by his profaneneſs, ruſhed upon him with furious rage, and hurried him out of the city, that they might deſtroy him by ſtoning.

It is remarked, that among thoſe, who encouraged this violent outrage, was a young man named Saul, who ſoon afterwards became a principal pillar of the Church, and preached the faith, which he then hated and oppoſed. He gave conſent to Stephen's death, and, in teſtimony of approbation, took in charge the garments of thoſe, who ſhed his blood. Do we not lament their blind and intemperate zeal? They ſuppoſed, that they were doing God ſervice *, and pre-

* John xvi. 2.

tended

tended a regard to his law. But, alas! they knew not, what were their real principles. O Lord, deliver us from ſuch grievous deluſion; and, while we profeſs to contend for thy truth and glory, ſuffer us not to be carried away by the tempers of Satan!

We turn our eyes from the madneſs of the murderers, to contemplate the conduct of the dying ſaint. With unſhaken courage, with ſweet compoſure, with lively faith, and fervent love, he cloſed his valuable life, and left a bright pattern for the admiration of the Church in every ſucceeding age. While they hurled upon him the inſtruments of deſtruction, he looked up in prayer, and commended his ſoul into the hands of the Saviour, whom he beheld in glory. "Knowing, in whom he had believed, and being perſuaded that he was able to keep that which he committed unto him againſt that day*," he exclaimed, "Lord Jeſus, receive my ſpirit."

We remark, to whom his ſolemn petition was addreſſed, and we are at no loſs to collect his opinion of the divine nature of Chriſt. He conſidered him, evidently, as poſſeſſed of power to preſerve the ſacred depoſit, then intruſted to him, and as "the true God," who demands ſupreme reverence and worſhip. Shall any preſume to inſinuate, that this eminent ſaint, "being full of the Holy Ghoſt," could die in the commiſſion of idolatry? But this horrible poſition muſt be maintained, if it be not allowed, that Jeſus Chriſt is God, equal with the Father. It is obſervable, that Stephen here paid the ſame adoration to the Redeemer,

* 2 Tim. i. 12.

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in delivering up to him the care of his departing ſoul, which the Redeemer himſelf offered to the Father, when he ſaid, " Into thy hands I commend my ſpirit *."

Amidſt vollies of ſtones, which were caſt upon his bruiſed body, Stephen continued unſhaken in his mind. Confident of his own ſecurity, he felt the tendereſt compaſſion for the perſons, who were bringing upon themſelves the guilt of innocent blood, and prayed aloud upon his bended knees, that their heinous offence might not riſe up in judgment to their condemnation. He cried, " Lord, lay not this ſin to their charge." How amiable the temper here manifeſted! What an illuſtrious diſplay of the power of divine grace! What a ſtriking reſemblance between the dying conduct of this holy martyr, and that of the bleſſed Redeemer, who, likewiſe, in his laſt moments, thus interceded for his murderers, " Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do †!"

The whole of St. Stephen's deportment proved, that he was ſuperior to all the menaces and cruelties of his enemies. When he had offered up his devout ſupplications for them, " he fell aſleep:" he met his diſſolution with as much compoſure, as if he were retiring from the fatigues of the day, and ſeeking reſt and refreſhment in ſleep for his weary body. Such is the cloſe of life to the believer in Jeſus. Surely, we are conſtrained to ſay, " Bleſſed are the dead, which die in the Lord, from henceforth. Yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works

* Luke xxiii. 46. † xxiii. 34.

do

do follow them*."—"Them, alſo, which ſleep in Jeſus, will God bring with him†."

The departure of this illuſtrious ſaint, ſo glorious and happy to himſelf, appeared a heavy loſs to the Church, eſpecially in ſuch a ſeaſon of violent perſecution. As a teſtimony of the high eſtimation, in which he was held, "devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him‡." It is not wrong to deſire, that uſeful lives may be ſpared, or, when they are taken away, to grieve for the many inconveniencies, which we may ſuſtain, and the obſtruction, which may be apprehended, to the work of God. But is it thus, that the enemies of true religion die? Their removal is, frequently, an acknowledged bleſſing to ſociety. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedneſs:" and, "when the wicked periſh, there is ſhouting§."

A ſerious review of this ſingular narration will ſuggeſt various inſtructions.

1. It will confirm us in the belief of the Goſpel. Among other evidences in ſupport of our holy faith, we may produce the ſufferings of its primitive teachers, as furniſhing a very ſtrong argument. They, ſurely, who had the beſt opportunities of examining, were perſuaded of its truth and excellency, ſince they cheerfully endured the ſevereſt tortures in its defence. Stephen was the firſt, who died in the cauſe; but many others ſoon followed his example. Could they be actuated by intereſted views? Did they conduct

* Rev. xiv. 13. † 1 Theſſ. iv. 14. ‡ Acts viii. 1, 2.
§ Prov. xiv. 32. xi. 10.

themſelves

themſelves like impoſtors? The holy martyr, whom we here contemplate, plainly found in his laſt moments the reality and bleſſedneſs of that religion, which he ſo powerfully maintained. By the peaceful and triumphant manner of his death, in ſuch circumſtances of bodily pain, he has left an unqueſtionable proof, that our Redeemer is mighty. Many private Chriſtians, likewiſe, at the hour of their departure, though they ſuffer not by the hand of violence, yet put it beyond a doubt, by their heavenly tempers and lively joys, that their ſyſtem is not a "cunningly deviſed fable," or their faith a vain deluſion. O let us liſten to their teſtimony, and be animated by their example! May our laſt end be like their's; and, when we are cloſing our eyes upon every thing below, may we be able to ſay, "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

2. It will teach us how to meet the fierceſt oppoſition for the truth's ſake. Our obſervations on this head may be thought ill-ſuited to the preſent ſtate of things. We grant, that the ſame violence of perſecution, which occurred in former times, does not now prevail. We allow the candour of the age; we are thankful for the mild and equitable laws, which prevent or puniſh any outrage upon our perſons. But there is ſtill "the ſtrife of tongues," the "trial of cruel mockings," which cannot be reſtrained: and theſe have conſiderable influence in deterring men from a zealous profeſſion of religion. Though we are not called to martyrdom, it muſt be felt as extremely painful to be deſpiſed and calumniated by thoſe, whoſe friendſhip we are anxious to preſerve.

We

We learn, however, from Stephen's example, to refift our enemies with prudence and courage. If, like him, we would "put to filence the ignorance of foolifh men," we fhould be able to give a confiftent account of our faith, and defend our principles. Much wifdom, alfo, will be requifite, in order to adapt our difcourfe to the circumftances, in which we may be placed. Yet let us beware of cowardice, and, while we behold Stephen's intrepidity, determine never to defert the caufe of truth, for the fake of conciliating the efteem of its oppofers. What have we to fear, if we ferve the Lord Chrift?

The prefent hiftory teaches us, likewife, to unite with an immovable firmnefs the exercife of meeknefs and love. Stephen complained not of the injurious treatment, which he received. Inftead of throwing out bitter invectives, he teftified his readinefs to pardon, by commending his murderers to the mercy and forgivenefs of God. By fuch a fingular difplay of forbearance and kindnefs, he brought more credit to the Gofpel, than he could have done by any other arguments. Have we learnt to fuffer with a fimilar difpofition? Ah! how much do we difhonour the caufe of Chrift by the peevifhnefs of our fpirit, and the keennefs of our refentment againft thofe, who reproach or infult us! Or rather, do we not prove, that we have not yet underftood the extent of that holinefs, which our religion requires?

3. It encourages us to expect fufficient ftrength and comfort, under all our perfecutions for righteoufnefs' fake. This primitive martyr ftands as a witnefs for

the grace and faithfulneſs of his divine Maſter, who will never abandon or deceive his upright ſervants. That ancient promiſe is verified in the caſe of every ſincere believer: "As thy days, ſo ſhall thy ſtrength be*." And will not this ſuffice us? If the world frown, yet Jeſus will ſmile: if they curſe, He will command a bleſſing. Whatever may be taken from us for our attachment to him, He will make us abundant compenſation. Though the moſt numerous and powerful adverſaries declare againſt us, we may exult in dependence on his veracity, and ſay, "The Lord is on my ſide, I will not fear †."

We need not, we ought not, to ſtagger at the moſt terrible appearances of death. We perceive in St. Stephen's countenance, how Jeſus can lighten the dark valley, and, even in that tremendous paſſage, fill our ſouls with peace and joy. Why ſhould we not hope to maintain ſuch a holy confidence? This, at leaſt, the grace of our God can beſtow. Indeed, without a viſion, we are ſure of what is beyond the preſent ſcene: the veil of the heavens is even rent to us, and we contemplate the Saviour, waiting to receive us to manſions of eternal bleſſedneſs. Let us perſevere in faith and patience, and ſoon ſhall the portals be thrown wide open for our honourable admiſſion. "If we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him ‡." For thus he addreſſes every Chriſtian ſoldier, enliſted under his banner, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life §."

* Deut. xxxiii. 25. † Pſal. cxviii. 6. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 12. § Rev. ii. 10.

We

We pray, therefore, with our church;

"Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors, by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen *."

* Collect for St. Stephen's day.

SAINT PAUL.

CHAP. IX.

SECT. I.

Paul, his extraction and education—a bigotted Pharisee—persecuted the Church—suddenly stopped by an appearance of Christ—brought to acknowledge and submit to him—struck blind—recovered his sight—baptized by Ananias—preached Christ—Observations on his conversion.

THE Lord God frequently accomplishes his purposes by such instruments, as are thought weak and contemptible, and thus proves, that his cause is not indebted to any human abilities for support. But, at some times and for special purposes, He is pleased to select persons of admired endowments, whom infidelity would gladly have classed amongst its advocates, and to render them of extensive service to the interests of Christianity. Alas! how often do splendid gifts become a snare and a curse, not to the possessors only, but to society, being employed in defence of erroneous and destructive principles! How different is the case, when they are consecrated to the Lord, and devoted to the use of the sanctuary! Then indeed they appear truly

truly excellent, deſerve our higheſt eſteem, and contribute to the temporal and eternal happineſs of men.

Such reflections ariſe from the conſideration of the character now before us. St. Paul was furniſhed with large intellectual powers, and ample attainments in literature, which would have done credit to any cauſe. But it is our province to contemplate the Chriſtian, rather than the Scholar, and to admire, not ſo much his natural genius and abilities, as "the exceeding grace of God in him." That grace ſtamped a dignity and worth on all his qualifications, and gave them their proper direction and employment. Let us hear his own grateful acknowledgment; "By the grace of God I am what I am *." None ever ſhone with greater luſtre than he did, after he had once entered on the ſervice of Chriſt: none ſeem to have arrived at a higher degree of perfection, or to have been honoured with more extenſive uſefulneſs in the world. We thank God for the amazing effects of his preaching, and eſpecially for his inſpired compoſitions, which conſtitute a conſiderable part of the New Teſtament, and which will deſcend as an ineſtimable bleſſing to ages yet unborn. May we all partake of the ſame ſpirit, and learn from his example and exhortations to yield ourſelves to the Saviour with the warmeſt affections and with unreſerved obedience!

Saul, for ſuch was his name originally, was born at Tarſus in Cilicia, and, through peculiar favour granted to the natives of that place, entitled to the freedom and privileges of a Roman citizen †. He ſprang from

* 1 Cor. xv. 10. † Acts xxii. 3, 28.

Jewiſh parents, and boaſted that he could trace his deſcent from Abraham, and had conformed to all ritual injunctions; "circumciſed the eighth day, of the ſtock of Iſrael, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews *." He was taught the common buſineſs of a tent-maker †; but we cannot on that account conclude, that he was confined to any ſervile labour, or placed in a mean ſituation ‡. He enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education; being well inſtructed in the learning of the times, and furniſhed with a conſiderable ſhare of reading in the Greek and Latin writers.

Probably at an early age, he went to Jeruſalem, to acquire the neceſſary acquaintance with Jewiſh literature, with the principles of his own religion, and the moſt generally received interpretations of the Old Teſtament. For thoſe purpoſes he was placed under the celebrated Doctor, Gamaliel, and, as his pupil, "brought up at his feet." There he made conſiderable proficiency in his ſtudies, and ſoon diſcovered a zealous attachment to all the Moſaic inſtitutions. Such an attachment might be greatly increaſed by the influence of his tutor; at leaſt, he came out from under his care a rigid, bigotted Phariſee. He laid an undue ſtreſs on the obſervance of Jewiſh ceremonies; and, as he could not bear to hear of their abolition or inſuffi-

* 2 Cor. xi. 22. Phil. iii. 5. † Acts xviii. 3.

‡ It was cuſtomary with the Jews, even the moſt opulent, to train up their children to the knowledge of ſome trade, by which they might be able to earn their ſupport in life, if they ſhould be reduced to difficulties.

ciency, he imbibed, with his firſt rudiments, a ſpirit of oppoſition to the Goſpel. He thought, and it ſeemed to be a firm and well-grounded conviction, that it was his bounden duty to exert himſelf againſt the Chriſtian faith; "that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jeſus of Nazareth*."

He acted, as would generally be allowed, ſincerely, and according to the dictates of his conſcience, while he perſecuted, and wiſhed, if poſſible, to extirpate, the profeſſors of this new religion. But the plea of ſincerity and conſcience will not excuſe him. It was his ſin, as it is the ſin of many, not to be better informed: a blamable and corrupt temper of mind prevented him from giving the Goſpel a ſerious attention and fair examination. He muſt have had many opportunities of being acquainted with its evidence, during his reſidence at Jeruſalem; but he was not diſpoſed to ſee the truth of a ſyſtem, which totally ſubverted his proud principles; he obſtinately refuſed to admit the light, which was offered. Hence he became "a blaſphemer, and a perſecutor, and injurious†;" preſumptuouſly uttering profane ſpeeches againſt the Lord Chriſt, ſetting himſelf in oppoſition to all, who called upon his name, and treating them with every ſpecies of violence. He concluded, that he was doing God ſervice; a ſentiment, that betrayed an extreme blindneſs and depravity‡.

A. D. 34. The ſacred hiſtory firſt introduces his name upon the death of St. Stephen. When that holy

* Acts xxvi. 5, 9. Gal. i. 14. † 1 Tim. i. 13.
‡ John xvi. 2, 3.

martyr was ſtoned, Saul, who had probably been preſent at Stephen's ſolemn ſermon, gave his approbation and aſſiſtance to the perpetration of the horrid murder*. He proceeded much farther. With a furious and voracious diſpoſition, like a beaſt of prey, he purſued the diſciples of Chriſt, that he might tear and devour them. He went great lengths indeed, before it pleaſed God to ſtop his mad career. "He made havock of the Church, entering into every houſe, and haling men and women," paying no deference to ſex or age, "committed them to priſon †." He confeſſes, that he "impriſoned and beat in every ſynagogue them that believed ‡;" that he "puniſhed them oft in every ſynagogue, and compelled them to blaſpheme, and, being exceedingly mad againſt them, perſecuted them even unto ſtrange cities §." It is obvious that he ſought nothing leſs than their total extirpation. "He breathed out threatenings and ſlaughter ‖;" as if, with every breath he drew, he denounced vengeance and deſtruction to the poor ſaints. He applied for the influence and authority of the high prieſt, who probably was not backward to countenance and promote his plans, that he might carry his perſecution even to the diſtant city of Damaſcus. And on this expedition he ſet out, in company with others, who were commiſſioned to aſſiſt him in his purpoſes, or whom ſimilar fury and malice prompted to attend him.

After ſuch an account, can any doubt be entertained of the real ſtate of his mind at that time?

* Acts vii. 58. viii. 1. xxii. 20. † viii. 3. ‡ xxii. 19. § xxvi. 11. ‖ ix. 1, 2.

Whatever

Whatever may be ſaid of his integrity or good intentions, is it not evident from this deſcription, that he was then "in the gall of bitterneſs, and in the bond of iniquity?" Shall we not allow his own confeſſion, that he was "the chief of ſinners," "not meet to be called an Apoſtle, becauſe he perſecuted the Church of God*?" The principles, by which he was actuated, and the conduct he purſued, were highly offenſive to God; ſo that we cannot but conſider him, in that period of his life, as obnoxious to the divine indignation. We grant that he preſerved a ſtrict regularity of manners, that his deportment was moral, in the common acceptation of morality, and even blameleſs before men. He was, alſo, conſtant and exact in all the offices of external devotion: but his religion was the offspring of pride and ignorance. He "went about to eſtabliſh his own righteouſneſs," and maintained a confident aſſurance of his ſafety. Alas! he "was alive without the law†:" he underſtood not the extenſive and ſpiritual demands of God's precepts, or the tremendous conſequence of the leaſt deviation from duty. He was therefore elated with a conceit of his goodneſs; though, at the very time, his obedience was not only partial, but wrong throughout. With all his fair appearances and high pretenſions, he "was in the fleſh, and the motions of ſins, which were by the law, did work in his members to bring forth fruit unto death‡."

Some have ſuppoſed, that, on account of his ſincerity, he poſſeſſed a previous diſpoſition to receive

* 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 Cor. xv. 9. † Rom. vii. 9. ‡ Rom. vii. 5.

the Goſpel. But men of ſuch a Phariſaical ſpirit, as he ſhewed, are the moſt unwilling to "ſubmit unto the righteouſneſs of God." Others have repreſented his ſtate and character in ſo favourable a light, that no conſiderable change could be neceſſary; nay, that he deſerved the grace, which was afterwards beſtowed, as a reward for his integrity. How contrary to this were his own ſentiments! In all his writings, he deſcribes his guilt as extremely heinous and aggravated, and ſpeaks with aſtoniſhment of the mercy of God, from which he ſeemed to be farther removed than any other ſinner: he is always ready to produce his own caſe as the moſt extraordinary inſtance of forgiveneſs, extended to an atrocious offender.

Yet we allow, that his ignorance, though it forms not an excuſe, is in ſome ſenſe, a palliation*. Had he proceeded the ſame lengths in oppoſing Chriſt, againſt clear information and ſtrong convictions, we apprehend, that he would have been given up to a judicial hardneſs, beyond the poſſibility of pardon. Let none flatter themſelves, that the want of inſtruction will be a ſufficient ſecurity. The moſt awful denunciations are levelled againſt thoſe, who know not God and his truth †. You may be confident of your own rectitude, and yet be grievouſly deceived. Even a miſguided conſcience may prove deſtructive. Though you abſtain from groſs immoralities, and be admired for your punctual attention to religious duties, your prevailing tempers may be ſuch, as to render you odious to God. Come, and learn from the example

* 1 Tim. i. 13. † 1 Cor. xv. 34. 2 Theſſ. i. 8.

before

before us the neceſſity of a total renovation. There is an univerſal depravity of nature, which requires to be ſubdued. You muſt "put off the old man, and be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind *:" and till this be effected, your pretended obedience, is deteſtable, as proceeding from corrupt motives.

A. D. Such a change took place in Saul, when he was
35. about the age of twenty-four years, as is generally ſuppoſed, and within two or three after the death of Chriſt. Young as he was, he had given full proof of a decided and bitter oppoſition to the Goſpel. He had, indeed, been "ſeparated from his mother's womb †," in the counſels of God: but the call was long deferred, that the riches of divine grace might be more glorioufly exhibited. We are now to behold the Lord Jeſus, who had ſhewn all long-ſuffering, taking to himſelf his great power, in an inſtant ſubduing the fierce enmity of the rebel, and attaching him by the ſtrongeſt ties of affection to his own perſon and ſervice.

Saul had come into the neighbourhood of Damaſcus, with murderous rage againſt all the diſciples of Jeſus, and, poſſibly, was anticipating the pleaſure he ſhould receive in binding and torturing them ‡. He was within view of the city, when ſuddenly the appearance of an uncommon brightneſs and glory ſhining from heaven, which far exceeded the ſplendour of the ſun, checked his progreſs. This occurred at mid-day, which rendered the phenomenon the more

* Eph. iv. 22, 23. † Gal. i. 15. ‡ Acts ix. 3—22. xxii. 6—16. xxvi. 12—20.

ſingular.

singular. Both Saul and his companions were instantly struck to the ground, dazzled and confounded. The voice of insulted majesty reproved him with peculiar solemnity, and thus called him to account for his injurious conduct; "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

It should seem, that not only was this remarkable address distinctly heard, but some august personage was exhibited to his view. Saul enquired, "Who art thou, Lord?" Probably, Christ manifested himself in human form, encircled with that lustre, which he possesses in his present exaltation, while the answer was returned, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." As if he had said, "I, who appear before thee with such marks of elevated dignity, am no other than the despised Nazarene, against whom thy rage is ultimately directed. I consider the insults and oppression, which my faithful people suffer, as offered to myself. But thy furious attempts, in the final event, cannot hurt me or my cause: thou art only wounding thyself. Cease, then, from thy foolish and wicked opposition."

Wonderful indeed was the condescension of the Lord, in arguing with one so full of enmity! It was amazing forbearance and compassion, that he did not "make bare his holy arm," destroy the persecutor, and leave him a monument of righteous vengeance. But he spoke in mercy, and yet spoke effectually. Saul instantly submitted with unfeigned contrition, and presumed not to allege any thing in his own defence. A sudden conviction of his enormous

guilt,

guilt, and a ſight of the glory of the Redeemer, whom he had ſo daringly provoked, almoſt overwhelmed him with fear and aſtoniſhment. Perhaps doubting whether there could be any hope for him, yet reſolved to try the effect of an humble application, he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Thus reſigning himſelf into the hands of Jeſus, he obtained forgiveneſs. He was directed to go into the city for further inſtruction, and encouraged by an aſſurance, that he ſhould be appointed a miniſter of the Goſpel with a divine commiſſion, under the immediate protection of Heaven. It was declared, that he ſhould be the favoured Inſtrument of carrying the glad tidings of ſalvation to Heathen lands, and extending to many ſouls the various bleſſings of the redemption, that is in Chriſt Jeſus.

The viſion being ended, Saul aroſe; but the ſtupendous luſtre, which had ſhone upon him, deprived him of ſight. His eyes were cloſed in darkneſs; an emblem of the former blindneſs of his ſoul. Unable, therefore, to guide himſelf, he was conducted to Damaſcus, where he continued, probably in extreme confuſion and diſtreſs, for three days without beholding any object or receiving any food. That ſeaſon he employed in ſerious recollection and fervent prayer, humbly waiting for further deliverance. The Lord graciouſly remarked the change, and ſaid of him, "Behold, he prayeth!" He had, even from his youth, repeated forms of devotion; but never before that period had his heart been raiſed to heaven with earneſt ſupplication. It pleaſes God, in general, to afford

young converts opportunity for the exercise of penitential sorrow and importunate cries for mercy, before he pours in upon them the clear light and full comforts of the Gospel. This may be a time of heaviness, but it furnishes an useful and necessary preparation of mind; and joy at length, will certainly succeed.

A disciple at Damascus was sent by express revelation to restore to Saul his lost sight, and confirm him in the Christian faith. The coming and design of that messenger had also been intimated to Saul by a previous vision; and this coincidence of circumstances proved more evidently, that the whole transaction was the mighty work of God, and not a delusion or imposture. Ananias was the person commissioned to visit the "chosen vessel;" and by his means Saul was instantly delivered from blindness, filled with the Holy Ghost, furnished with miraculous powers, and admitted by baptism into the Church of Christ.

What a change was this! He, who had intended to harass and torment the disciples, joined himself to them as their friend and brother, and esteemed it the highest honour to become a follower and preacher of Jesus the Nazarene, whose name he had treated with blasphemous contempt. Having received full information both of the facts and doctrines of the Gospel, by direct communications from heaven, he "conferred not with flesh and blood *," consulted not the dictates of worldly prudence or carnal inclinations, but immediately began to declare and maintain, in the

* Gal. i. 16.

ſynagogues of Damaſcus, what he had learnt by revelation, and proved to the aſtoniſhment of thoſe, who had known his former character, that Jeſus is indeed the promiſed Saviour. Thus he "preached the faith, which once he deſtroyed *," and ſoon appeared to be "a veſſel unto honour, ſanctified and meet for the Maſter's uſe †." Shall we not "glorify God in him?" "Bleſſed be the Lord God, the God of Iſrael, who only doeth wondrous things: and bleſſed be his glorious name for ever ‡."

The continuance and good effects of this change demonſtrate, that it was no fiction, nor the production of terror or of fancy, but a real converſion, accompliſhed by the immediate interpoſition of the Lord from heaven. From the moment that Saul was firſt ſtruck to the ground, what an aſtoniſhing difference did he manifeſt in his whole ſpirit and conduct! Where is now the fury of the perſecutor? and what is become of all his murderous deſigns againſt the believers at Damaſcus? "The wolf dwells with the lamb, and the leopard lies down with the kid," no longer ſeeking to "hurt" or "deſtroy §." Where is the tongue of the blaſphemer, ſo accuſtomed to utter profane ſpeeches againſt Chriſt? The very mention of Jeſus of Nazareth would have provoked his indignation: but no ſooner does the Saviour reveal his grace and glory, than the fierce adverſary relinquiſhes all further plans of oppoſition, is aſhamed of his former enmity, and alarmed for his future ſafety: he

* Gal. i. 23. † 2 Tim. ii. 21. ‡ Pſal. lxxii. 18, 19. § Iſa. xi. 6—9.

cries

cries for mercy, acknowledges the divine character, and desires to follow the directions, of Jesus. "O Lord, what I know not, teach thou me; guide me into that way, in which I have foolishly refused to walk; rescue my guilty soul from deserved wrath, and shew me what thou requirest to be done. I give myself to thee, and desire to live in cheerful and unreserved obedience to thy precepts." Such is the purport of his devout exclamation, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This is the language of conversion; and this effect could no more be produced by natural causes, than the sun could be obstructed in its course, or the rivers made to flow backward in their channels, without a miraculous interference.

At the period here referred to, as we apprehend, "the commandment came, sin revived, and he died *." While his mind was deeply impressed with a conviction of the purity and extent of the law, he felt within himself the powerful working of a corrupt nature, and saw that as a transgressor, under condemnation, he was liable to perish. The haughty Pharisee, therefore, was turned into a weeping penitent. "Through the law," he became "dead to the law †;" he gave up all the proud expectations, which he had entertained from his own obedience; and "what things were gain to him, those he counted loss for Christ ‡." The ground of his former dependence failing, he relinquished it, and surrendered himself to Jesus, in whom he then trusted for salvation, and to whose service he devoted the whole of his future life.

* Rom. vii. 9. † Gal. ii. 19. ‡ Phil. iii. 7.

From

From that moment he continued zealously attached to the cause of Christ, though under the strongest possible temptations to desert it, and laboured more abundantly than any others. Shall we not say with devout affections; "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes *?"

But the benefits were not confined to St. Paul alone. We are not told, how his companions were affected, who, probably, were equally ignorant or equally malevolent with himself. For some time they remained speechless, under an impression of great terror; but we know not, that any of them became true converts. Yet there were others, for whose advantage this singular interposition was evidently designed. Many saw, confessed, and admired, the change: many were convinced of the truth of the Gospel, and turned to the Lord. This new preacher, in his zeal to propagate the faith, travelled from city to city, from one kingdom to another, and thousands, believing his testimony, were added to the Church. No menaces or sufferings from men could deter them from entering on the service of Christ; in whom they found a sufficient compensation, and a never failing source of joy. They "shone as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life," and thus proved that the Apostle "had not run in vain, neither laboured in vain †."

What shall we say to such effects as these? They could not proceed from mere imagination; they demonstrate incontestably, that the Christian system is

* Psal. cxviii. 23. † Phil. ii. 15, 16.

not a delusion or a cheat. Let the declarations of St. Paul be regarded, as they ought to be, and it must be allowed that our faith is divine. He affirms, that he received it by the inspiration of the Almighty, and not by human teaching *. He preached it with zeal and success, before he had any communication with the other Apostles: and they all perfectly coincided in their account both of facts and doctrines. Now to what shall we ascribe this exact agreement, if not to the influence of Heaven?

Shall Paul be deemed an impostor †? What motive could induce him to change his party, and contrive such a plan of deception? Did he seek for wealth, honour, power, or sensual gratification? No: all these he cheerfully renounced; and, while he patiently endured extreme afflictions, he proved, at least, that he firmly believed the Gospel. But was he not an enthusiast? No: the farthest from it possible. He betrayed no mark of an enthusiast, except his zeal should be represented in that light. We observe, however, that it was not the blind and furious zeal of a bigot or fanatic, but the generous ardour of one who knew the truth, and felt the unspeakable importance, of his commission. Besides, no supposition of enthusiasm can ever account for the success of his labours, which, of itself, evinces that the hand of the Lord was with him.

If it be said, that, though sincere, he might yet be deceived by others; we ask, By whom? By the disci-

* Gal. i. 11, &c.

† See this subject clearly stated in Lyttleton's Observations on the conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul.

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ples of Chrift? They were hardly perfuaded to credit his integrity, and the reality of his converfion; nor could the change originate from them, with whom he had no previous intercourfe. And it will not, furely, be alleged, that he was impofed on by his former affociates, who fought his life for deferting their caufe. The only fair conclufion is, that he was conftituted an Apoftle by the Lord Jefus, and that the doctrine which he preached is a revelation from heaven. Let us rejoice and give thanks for this interefting event, and pray that "the light of the glorious Gofpel of Chrift may fhine unto us."

We admire the divine perfections as difplayed in St. Paul's converfion. We cannot but perceive in it the fovereignty of God, who, without being accountable to us, raifes up what inftruments he pleafes for his own fervice and glory. Let us difpute as we may, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy *." It becomes not us to quarrel with his appointments. "Who art thou, that repliest againft God †?" The cafe before us fhews, how feeble is the ftrongeft oppofition to Him. What can the moft furious perfecutors effect? "He that fitteth in the heavens fhall laugh; the Lord fhall have them in derifion ‡." He can fuddenly confound their purpofes, ftrike terror into their hearts, abafe and humble them, and even render them zealous advocates for his truth. "There is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works §!"

The wifdom of God, alfo, appears wonderful in

* Rom. ix. 15. † 20. ‡ Pfal. ii. 4. § lxxxvi. 8.

ſelecting a perſon of St. Paul's former character, whom we ſhould have thought moſt unlikely to be employed in the Church of Chriſt. On many accounts he muſt be allowed to be a deſirable and unexceptionable witneſs for the Goſpel. Such had been his violent prejudice againſt it; and, afterwards, ſuch was his patient ſubmiſſion to ſuffering, ſo firm the courage, and unwearied the aſſiduity, which he ſhewed in its ſupport, that, without conſidering his ſtrong natural abilities, we admire the ſuitableneſs of his appointment to the miniſtry, though he "was before a blaſphemer, a perſecutor, and injurious."

In the moſt ſignal manner, the rich mercy of our God and the ſufficiency of his grace in Jeſus Chriſt are here exhibited. St. Paul repreſents his own caſe as ſo remarkable in this view, that it may furniſh encouragement to penitents in every age, whatever their former character may have been. He obtained forgiveneſs for this very purpoſe, that none might deſpair. The Saviour, who reſcued him, can recover you, who have departed the fartheſt from God: he can ſubdue your depravity, ſanctify your polluted heart, and pardon your numerous and aggravated ſins, even your fierce oppoſition to his Goſpel, and profane blaſphemies againſt himſelf. O rejoice in that "faithful ſaying," which is indeed "worthy of all acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave ſinners *:" and, like the Apoſtle, "count all things but dung, that you may win Chriſt, and be found in Him †!"

* 1 Tim. i. 15. † Phil. iii. 8, 9.

SAINT

SAINT PAUL.

SECT. 2.

Paul, driven from Damascus and then from Jerusalem, fled to Tarsus—accompanied Barnabas to Antioch in Syria, and thence to Jerusalem—sent forth with him to preach to the Gentiles, travelled through Cyprus—went to Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe—returned to Antioch in Syria—attended the council at Jerusalem—reproved Peter—separated from Barnabas.

RELIGION consists not in a system of merely speculative notions: the sentiments and affections, which it excites in the heart, produce such excellent fruits in the life, as evince its holy nature and divine original. Who will not allow, that this was eminently the case with St. Paul? We have already intimated that the truth of his conversion appeared by its effects: we must now appeal to the whole of his subsequent conduct for the proof of this observation. We shall perceive him, to the last moment, invariably and zealously attached to the cause of Christ, exerting himself not only as a soldier, but as a principal leader and commander, in the armies of the faithful. We cannot but remark with admiration his activity, courage, fervour, and perseverance:

yet at the ſame time we may propoſe him as a bright pattern of meekneſs, patience, contempt of the world, purity, and ſpirituality of mind. Let it be our pleaſing employment, to accompany him from place to place, and contemplate the important purpoſes, for which he was called and ordained to the Apoſtolic function.

The lovers of hiſtory may here find enough to engage their attention, and excite their wonder. We invite them to ſtudy the records of the primitive Church, which abound with facts moſt curious and intereſting, and are particularly entitled to regard, as proceeding from the pen of inſpiration. Come, and ſee the great Apoſtle, by his indefatigable labours, planting, watering, enlarging, and protecting many Chriſtian ſocieties. Come, and obſerve the kingdom of Satan ſhaken and ſubverted, and upon its ruins the kingdom of peace and righteouſneſs eſtabliſhed.

St. Paul began, immediately after his converſion, to declare the revelations he had received, and to preach Chriſt in the ſynagogues at Damaſcus *. There he continued for three years, excepting the time which he ſpent in Arabia, whither he retired for a ſeaſon, and where, probably, he was favoured with clearer diſcoveries of divine truth †. He ſhewed a particular concern for his unbelieving brethren among the Jews, and endeavoured with unremitting zeal to recommend the Goſpel to their acceptance. Did they not credit his teſtimony? We might have ſuppoſed, that ſuch a witneſs would have removed every objec-

* Acts ix. 20, &c. † Gal. i. 17.

tion.

tion. But alas! through the perverseness of nature, men are disposed to resist every effort for their salvation. Instead of listening to his arguments and exhortations, the Jews conspired against his life, and thus exhibited to his view a picture of what he himself had been. A formidable combination was entered into, and the governor of the city, together with his garrison, was employed to apprehend him. But their scheme failed; for what could all their counsels and preparations avail against the man, whom the Lord of hosts defended? "Through a window in a basket he was let down by the wall, and escaped their hands *."

A. D. 38. Upon that occasion he fled to Jerusalem, and there sought for the society of those very disciples, whom he had once abhorred and persecuted. They, however, remembering his former character, and not having received a satisfactory account of his conversion, were backward to credit his professions; till Barnabas interfered and related the important change, which had taken place. For a few days he had free communications with the Church, but was not indebted to the most eminent of the Apostles for his knowledge of the Gospel †. At Jerusalem he had been known as a violent enemy to the Christian faith; and therefore it might seem, that his testimony in its support would there meet with peculiar regard. Yet it proved otherwise. His zeal for the honour of the Saviour soon excited the indignation of his countrymen; and,

* 2 Cor. xi. 32, 33.

† Gal. i. 18, 19. Perhaps to this period of his history we should refer the trance, which he mentions, Acts xxii. 17.

being again obliged to fly for his life, he was conducted with haste to Tarsus, his native city.

A. D. 42. Here he obtained a safe retreat, and probably applied himself with diligence to the work of the ministry: but what was his success we are not informed. Nothing further is recorded of him during the three or four following years. Barnabas, at length, in great want of his assistance, found him at Tarsus, and prevailed on him to go to Antioch, the capital of Syria, where they laboured together for the space of a year with good effect *. Our Apostle, as we may conclude from his repeated visits, felt a peculiar attachment to the large and flourishing Church, which was gathered in that place: and there the disciples of Jesus first received the honourable appellation of CHRISTIANS. The name was once reproachful: we, perhaps, glory in it; but do we seriously consider, according to this profession, what is our relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, and what the ties which bind us to his person, and call for an inflexible attachment to his Gospel? Are we, what the title imports, his followers and servants?

Paul and his intimate companion, Barnabas, were sent from Antioch with certain charitable collections to the poor saints at Jerusalem, who were at that time distressed by famine: and, having faithfully executed their commission, they returned to Antioch, taking with them John Mark as their associate and assistant †.

A. D. 45. At length, those holy men, filled with zeal for God, went forth to propagate the Christian

* Acts xi. 25, &c. † Acts xii. 25.

faith

faith upon a more extensive plan. In obedience to an express revelation from God, they were set apart by the solemn prayers of certain teachers in the Church, and a peculiar influence of the Holy Ghost qualified them, for carrying the glad tidings of salvation among the Heathens *. They had previously committed themselves to the Lord; and, in consequence of their engagements with him, considered themselves at his disposal. Without hesitation or reluctance, therefore, they obeyed the call, not declining the most painful services, nor shrinking from formidable dangers. They accounted it sufficient that the Lord was with them, and had assigned them their work. Ah! where shall we now find such an unfeigned regard to God and his cause? Do not "all seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's †?"

They went out, like the Patriarch of old, "not knowing whither they went ‡," depending upon their Lord for guidance and protection. The other Apostles, also, were sent forth to evangelize the world; but little is told us concerning their labours. The sacred history of the Church, from this period, is confined chiefly to the exertions and sufferings of St. Paul; and yet it does not relate the whole, or give us even the closing scene of his life.

Paul, therefore, and his beloved Barnabas, set out from Antioch upon their momentous embassy. Having arrived at Cyprus, a large island in the Mediterranean sea, they travelled through it, preaching

* Acts xiii. 1, &c, † Phil. ii. 21. ‡ Heb. xi. 8.

by

by the way. At Paphos, a principal town, a singular occurrence happened. Sergius Paulus, the deputy or Roman governor of the country, discovered a favourable disposition, and expressed a desire to hear the Gospel. But Elymas, a noted magician in the place, endeavoured to prejudice him against it, probably through a fear of losing his own influence and importance. Immediately, however, at the word of Paul, this vile opposer of the faith, who laboured to keep others in spiritual darkness, was struck blind; and the ruler, convinced by the miracle, embraced the truth. Many circumstances conspire to prevent the free access of the ministers of Christ to persons of high rank. They, whose interest or ascendency is likely to be subverted by an admission of the Gospel, may always be expected to resist it: and therefore Satan, doubtless, employs his instruments, if possible, to exclude religion from courts and palaces. But our God, who is mighty, can suddenly confound the purposes of his enemies, and render them subservient to his counsels. In due time, through the strong influence of his Spirit, even "kings shall fall down before him," and become "the nursing-fathers" of his Church *.

From Cyprus, Paul and his companions went to Perga in Pamphylia; and there they were deserted by John Mark, who very dishonourably declined the service, and returned to Jerusalem. He did not renounce the faith; but his conduct was highly blamable, and produced bad consequences. Ah! what

* Psal. lxxii. 11. Isa. xlix. 23.

pain

pain do sincere persons feel, on account of such cases! Yet, considering what human nature is, we may expect to suffer, not only through the apostasy of false brethren, but also through the imprudence, sloth, and cowardice of real Christians. We ought to mourn for the discredit brought upon our profession, and yet at the same time remember, that "the foundation of God standeth sure *."

The zealous preachers, whom we are here contemplating, continued their progress. At Antioch in Pisidia, (a different town and far distant from the Antioch before mentioned) they attended the public worship of the Jewish synagogue on the sabbath-day. After the usual service, being permitted to address the people, Paul arose and spake in a most animated manner, declaring and enforcing the grand truths of the Gospel. To impress their minds in favour of his doctrine, he began with explaining some of the divine dispensations towards their ancestors, particularly in promising the Saviour, and gradually preparing them for his reception. He then proceeded to exhibit Jesus as the Christ, who had been predicted. He represented him as despised and rejected by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and there most injuriously suffering the death of the cross. But he maintained, that the whole of these transactions had occurred agreeably to their own scriptures, and that according to express prophecies, which they themselves acknowledged, Jesus had been raised from the grave, and proved to be the very Saviour, whom they professed to look for. He solemnly entreated them

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

to consider that full and free redemption, which was proposed to every believer, and warned them, by a tremendous denunciation, not to reject the gracious offer. Let us learn from the Apostle's sermon to be thankful for the clear light of the Gospel, with which we are favoured. "To us is the word of this salvation sent." But do we truly understand its import? or, do we cordially embrace it? O let us beware, lest we come under the condemnation of the despisers, who shall perish with aggravated ruin!

What was the effect of Paul's address? The generality of the congregation appear not to have been properly impressed: but certain Gentiles, who were present, requested that they might have an opportunity, on the following sabbath, of hearing the same truths enforced. Many of the Jews, also, and proselytes to their religion, after the dismission of the assembly, accompanied Paul and Barnabas, who in their private exhortations endeavoured to persuade them to persevere in a steadfast attachment to the Gospel. On the subsequent sabbath, the immense crowds of people, who were collected, excited the envious displeasure of the Jews: and accordingly, they began to oppose and blaspheme the doctrine delivered. Not discouraged, however, but rather animated by the violence of these objectors, Paul declared, that, though the first offer of mercy had been tendered to them, yet upon their refusal the invitation would be given to the Gentiles. Many of the latter description rejoiced at the intimation, and, through the rich and sovereign grace of God, embraced the Christian faith.

From

From them, likewife, the truth of God was differminated throughout all the neighbouring country.

The fuccefs was great; but that very circumftance rendered the adverfaries more furious; and a formidable hoft of perfecutors confpired together. The refult was, that Paul and his beloved affociate were forcibly driven from the place. Yet, even under that fevere ftorm, the fincere converts remained unfhaken, and experienced a feafon of peculiar happinefs. While their enemies raged and threatened, "the difciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghoft."

Surely, that violence is not to be dreaded, how extreme foever it may be, which cannot prevent us from receiving the lively comforts of religion, and which may have a tendency to promote thefe very comforts in our fouls. Let us "be ftrong, and of a good courage." Let us pray, that we, like the Chriftians at Antioch, may be favoured with an abundant meafure of inward peace and confolation from the divine Spirit; and then we fhall not be moved by the vehemence and menaces of oppofers. Wherever the Gofpel meets with any fignal fuccefs, it may be expected to produce contentions and feparations among thofe, who were intimately united. It draws forth from many perfons that enmity of the heart againft real godlinefs, which had been before concealed, and covered perhaps with the garb of piety. Among the perfecutors were "DEVOUT" as well as "honourable women:" and frequently, thofe, who have made a fhew of fanctity, and been admired on that account, are the

firft

first to raise objections. Many, also, among ourselves, like those of old, are disgusted with the large congregations, which generally attend the zealous preachers of the word of God. They often think and mention it as an upbraiding reproach, that such assemblies consist chiefly of the poor. That, which ought to be matter of rejoicing, excites envy and displeasure. Let those, however, who labour in the Gospel, be content to follow the steps of the Apostles, "by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true *."

Paul and Barnabas departed from Antioch, and upon quitting the place shook off the dust of their feet, as a testimony against the unbelieving inhabitants, agreeably to the directions of Jesus to his disciples †. Thence they proceeded to Iconium, and there opened their message with remarkable success ‡. In that city they continued for a considerable time, and with great courage declared the truth of God, which He was pleased to confirm by various miracles, and to make effectual to the conversion of many persons. But a furious opposition was raised against them, exactly similar to what they experienced at Antioch. They had numerous friends among the people; but others calumniated their characters and doctrine, and endeavoured to draw the public odium upon them. A party was formed, and a scheme laid, in which the men of chief power were engaged, to harass and by violent death destroy these new preachers. They, however, being apprized of the design,

* 2 Cor. vi. 8. † Mar. vi. 11. ‡ Acts xiv. 1, &c.

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made their eſcape to Lyſtra, and both there and throughout the neighbourhood, notwithſtanding their paſt and the proſpect of freſh dangers, laboured with unremitting ardour for the propagation of the Goſpel.

At Lyſtra a poor cripple, who had been lame from his birth, received an inſtantaneous cure by the word of St. Paul. The miracle, being openly performed, excited general attention. But ſuch was the blindneſs and wretched ſtupidity of the people, that, inſtead of deſiring to be inſtructed by theſe eminent teachers, they began to deify them, and actually prepared for them idolatrous ſacrifices. With wild vociferations they cried out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeneſs of men." Barnabas they called Jupiter, as being of the moſt ſtately appearance; and Paul obtained the title of Mercury, becauſe he was the principal ſpeaker.

This circumſtance could not but greatly diſtreſs them, who ſought no vain applauſe, and wiſhed to direct the regard of all to their Lord and Maſter. They were ſtruck with horror at the offer of divine honours, and doubtleſs felt more pain on that account, than for their ſevereſt perſecutions. They rent their clothes, in abhorrence of the profaneneſs, ran among the multitude with peculiar eagerneſs, reproved them for their folly in worſhipping men of the ſame infirmities with themſelves, and exhorted them to turn from ſuch ſenſeleſs practices to the ſervice of the living God, the Creator and Preſerver of heaven and earth. This bold and animated addreſs was ſcarcely ſufficient to divert them from their purpoſe. It

then, that these primitive assertors of the Christian faith were not actuated by selfish views or worldly expectations: they could and did declare, with the greatest sincerity, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord *." God forbid, that any, who sustain the ministerial office, should aim at their own exaltation, or be pleased with the flattering speeches and admiration of their hearers! They should desire to obtain the approbation of their fellow-creatures no farther, than as it may give them an opportunity of recommending the Saviour. Being chiefly concerned for his glory, they will be grieved, when He is overlooked, and they themselves are extravagantly praised.

Popular favour is a poor acquisition: "it is a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away †." The people at Lystra, who had proposed to worship St. Paul as a deity, being soon afterwards prejudiced by the objections of certain furious persecutors from Antioch and Iconium, rose up with violence against him, and stoned him. They then dragged him out of the city, with marks of extreme contempt, and left him as one dead. Here, therefore, the history of our Apostle was, to all human appearance, concluded. But the Lord God, who designed him for more extensive usefulness in the Church, interposed for his deliverance. He suddenly and miraculously restored him to his former strength, and the Apostle, undismayed by his enemies, returned to the city, and the next day travelled with

* 2 Cor. iv. 5.

† James iv. 14.

Barnabas to Derbe. It were easy for the Lord to rescue his servants from every danger and distress. Let us learn to commit ourselves cheerfully to his disposal, desirous only, whatever events may await us, that "Christ may be magnified in our body, whether it be by life or by death *."

At Derbe they preached with vigour and success, and there finished their progress for that time, advancing no farther into the country. They went back by the same road, and again visited the places, in which they had met with such violent opposition. Trusting in divine Providence, they dreaded no consequences to themselves; and they were solicitous to confirm and comfort those, who had received by their ministry the good word of God. They exhorted the disciples, therefore, throughout that region, to maintain their Christian profession under all their afflictions, and reminded them, that God has appointed his people to pass through many trials in the road to his kingdom. At the several towns, where churches were gathered, they ordained ministers over them for their spiritual guidance, and solemnly commended them all to the care and protection of the Lord Christ. Much regard is due to young converts, and much pains should be used to establish them in their holy calling, that they may not, by any temptations, be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. O be encouraged to persevere through all opposition, and "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown †!" Be not unwilling to suffer: the cross must be your present portion;

* Phil. i 20. † Rev. iii. 11.

it is your duty to bear it cheerfully, in the expectation of receiving "the crown of life."

At length theſe indefatigable labourers returned to Antioch in Syria, from which place they had firſt ſet out on their important expedition. There they fixed their abode for ſome time, that they might enjoy the ſociety of the faithful, and to them they recounted the various inſtances of ſupport and ſucceſs, with which they had been favoured in their miniſtry among the Gentiles. Shall not we, alſo, cultivate an intercourſe with thoſe, who know and love the Lord? And, when admitted to their friendſhip, ſhall we not embrace the opportunity of declaring, or enquiring after, the enlargement of the Church? Hath God "opened the door of faith" to thoſe, who were in darkneſs? Let this be proclaimed with grateful adoration: for no information can be more intereſting or delightful. Compared with this, how trifling and fooliſh are the ſubjects, which generally occupy converſation! How grievous is the ſtupidity of men, who, though eager to hear or relate every idle occurrence, have no deſire to be acquainted with the glorious work, which God is carrying on by the Goſpel of his Son!

A. D. 52. St. Paul and his companion were now called to different trials, not to contend with furious adverſaries, but to oppoſe and correct ſome dangerous miſtakes among the brethren. A diſſenſion aroſe, in conſequence of certain Jewiſh zealots maintaining, that circumciſion and the obſervance of the ceremonial law were abſolutely neceſſary for the ſalvation

vation of Gentile believers *. Our Apoſtle conſidered the ſentiment as a deſtructive error, ſubverting the very foundation of the Goſpel, and ſet himſelf to reſiſt it with great firmneſs. It implied, that the obedience and ſacrifice of Chriſt are not a ſufficient ground of dependence towards God, that we cannot be completely juſtified by faith alone, however ſincere, and that our own qualifications or performances have a ſhare, at leaſt, in procuring our favourable acceptance.

We might have thought, that poſitions, ſo directly contrary to the fundamental principles of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, would have gained no credit. But many were ſtaggered; and therefore, from a deſire of ſatisfying their conſciences, and reſtoring the peace of the Church, it was agreed that Paul and Barnabas ſhould go to Jeruſalem, and take the opinion of the Apoſtles and elders upon the ſubject †. Accordingly, a ſolemn council was there held, and the matter ſeriouſly diſcuſſed. A full account of the work of God among the Gentiles was given; and it was decided, that real believers, among the uncircumciſed, ſhould not be required to conform to the Moſaic rites, but be conſidered as complete in Chriſt Jeſus. With this decree the ambaſſadors returned to Antioch; and their intelligence produced great joy among the diſciples.

* Acts xv. 1, &c.

† It is ſuppoſed, that the Apoſtle refers to this journey, when he ſays, that he "went up by revelation." Doubtleſs, he then acted under the influence of the Spirit, and the conſultation was overruled for the clearer underſtanding and more explicit declaration of the Goſpel. Gal. ii. 1—10.

ciples. For that time the dispute was settled; but it broke out afterwards in other places, as appears from several of St. Paul's Epistles, especially from that to the Galatians.

Erroneous doctrines of a like dangerous tendency are propagated in the present day. Circumcision, indeed, is not insisted on; but, as if the merit of the Saviour were not sufficient for our justification, it is maintained that our own obedience must, in part at least, recommend us to God. Satan is ever labouring to divide the Church, and corrupt the minds of its members "from the simplicity that is in Christ *." He is the father of lies, and it is his grand artifice to spread false opinions. It is remarkable, that the unscriptural sentiments, advanced in modern times, made their appearance very early; and were permitted to do so, that they might receive a full confutation from the Apostles themselves. Let us beware of the subtle devices of our adversary, and, in order the more successfully to resist him, let us study the divine oracles, which will furnish us with weapons of defence against all the attacks of error.

During St. Paul's continuance at Antioch, he had occasion to speak in language of sharp reprehension to St. Peter, who visited the place, and withdrew from the Gentile converts through a fear of displeasing the Jews †. Paul stood forth as a bold advocate for the liberty of the Gospel, maintaining that the Gentiles, who were turned to God by faith, were as secure through the grace of the Saviour, as the

* 2 Cor. xi. 3. † Gal. ii. 11, &c.

Jews themſelves. It was a painful taſk to reprove a beloved brother; but, where the purity of God's truth is likely to ſuffer, we ſhould make no compliances, nor ſhew any partialities; we ſhould earneſtly contend for the honour of the Goſpel, even againſt our deareſt friends.

The Church at Antioch enjoyed the ſociety and the labours of St. Paul for ſome time. But being eager to extend his uſefulneſs, and confirm the diſciples at a diſtance, he propoſed to Barnabas, that they ſhould again viſit the people, to whom they had preached, and enquire into their ſtate. The ſcheme was readily agreed to; and yet it gave occaſion to a warm contention, which iſſued in a ſeparation of theſe two affectionate companions. We contemplate this circumſtance with wonder and grief. But, when we perceive the evident ſigns of wrong tempers in perſons ſo confeſſedly eminent, we ſhould learn to place no confidence in the moſt exalted of human characters, and to keep our own hearts with diligence and care. The cauſe of the difference appears trifling; but there is nothing, however inconſiderable, which may not excite and draw forth ſome latent corruption of the mind: nay, probably, we are moſt liable to fall by the ſmalleſt temptations; for theſe do not awaken our fears, or compel us to ſtand upon our guard.

Barnabas was attached to his nephew John Mark, and deſirous that he ſhould be received again as their aſſociate. Paul ſtated the impropriety of taking with them ſuch an attendant, as had ſhamefully

deſerted them on a former occaſion. Each of the diſputants might urge various reaſons, and, poſſibly, both were influenced by right motives. But we pretend not to juſtify every thing even in the Apoſtles. They were men, and ſometimes openly betrayed that depravity, which they continually lamented in ſecret. In the preſent caſe, we apprehend, the two parties felt a blamable warmth of temper. O let us watch, and, remembering what is in our hearts, always ſuſpect ſome danger nigh! We are expoſed in the company of deareſt friends, as well as in that of our moſt decided enemies.

But we admire the over-ruling providence of God, which in various ways brings good out of evil. This very diſagreement became the means of enlarging the Church, and promoting the ſalvation of many ſouls. The two preachers went different roads, carried the meſſage of the Goſpel to different quarters. Though parted from each other, they ſtill continued to publiſh it to an ignorant and unbelieving world; and their temporary diviſion became the cauſe of its more ſpeedy and extenſive propagation. It appears, alſo, that, whatever reſentment might be felt at the time, a perfect reconciliation was ſoon effected. Paul himſelf afterwards ſpoke in the higheſt terms, not only of his beloved Barnabas, but of Mark alſo, whom he received as his aſſiſtant *. Chriſtians may be ſeduced from the path of duty, but their ſincerity will be evinced by their recovery.

The example before us does not afford any juſt

* 1 Cor. ix. 6. Col. iv. 10. 2 Tim. iv. 11.

encouragement

encouragement to ſin; it furniſhes the ſtrongeſt arguments for holineſs. Well may we bluſh and hide our faces in the duſt, upon a compariſon of ourſelves with St. Paul. Do we not perceive in him an excellence of character, of which we are deſtitute? If it was right for him to labour with ſuch unwearied aſſiduity, to ſpend and be ſpent in the ſervice of Chriſt, ſhall we think ourſelves at liberty to lead an unprofitable and a ſenſual life, to take our eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry? No: we muſt be conformed to the ſpirit of the Apoſtles and primitive believers, and learn, like them, to "deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world, looking for that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*."

* Titus ii. 12, 13.

SAINT PAUL.

SECT. 3.

Paul circumcised Timothy at Lystra—came to Troas—thence to Philippi, where Lydia and the Jailer were converted—proceeded to Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth—visited Jerusalem, and then returned, confirming the churches.

Though Christians are indebted to the grace of God for every particle of excellence, which they possess, the effects of this grace are not equally conspicuous in them all. Frequently they, whose former spirit and conduct have been most opposite to the Gospel, shine with peculiar lustre after conversion. A larger experience of their own folly and perverseness renders them more humble and watchful: a stronger sense of their vast obligations to God for pardoning and subduing their iniquities, excites them to more lively and vigorous exertions in their holy profession. Such was the great Apostle, whose character we are contemplating. It is not spoken to the disparagement of other believers, when it is asserted, that we have known none more eminent in every Christian disposition and practice than St. Paul: nor was it the language of vain confidence or presumption, when he said

ſaid of himſelf, "In nothing am I behind the very chiefeſt Apoſtles *." Being conſtrained to mention his own caſe, he expreſſed an earneſt deſire, that the praiſe of all his attainments and uſefulneſs might be aſcribed to God alone. He declared, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace, which was beſtowed upon me, was not in vain: but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me †." May the conſideration of his example rouſe and animate our dull and inactive minds; and may the ſame bleſſed Spirit, which wrought effectually in him, enable us, alſo, to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!"

A. D. 53. Upon his ſeparation from Barnabas, having choſen Silas as his companion, he departed from Antioch with the prayers and benedictions of the Church, and travelled through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the faith of the diſciples ‡. When he came to Lyſtra, he met with Timothy, a pious and amiable youth, who afterwards attained conſiderable eminence §. St. Paul, being deſirous of taking him as an aſſociate in his further progreſs, and ſetting him apart for the work of the miniſtry, judged it expedient, that he ſhould ſubmit to the rite of circumciſion. The performance of this ceremony was in itſelf a matter of indifference, but might in the preſent inſtance prevent ſome objections againſt them and their doctrine. Notwithſtanding the liberty allowed to the

* 2 Cor. xii. 11. † 1 Cor. xv. 10. ‡ Acts xv. 40, 41. § xvi. 1, &c.

Gentiles,

Gentiles, it was ftill generally thought that all perfons of Jewifh extraction fhould conform to the Mofaic law. Now, as the mother of Timothy was a Jewefs, (though his father was a Greek) it feemed probable that his cafe would be narrowly obferved, and that, if circumcifion were omitted, he would be unacceptable to the Jews, and Paul's intimacy with him give them great offence.

The conduct of the Apoftle on another occafion was very different, and has excited fome furprife. He firmly oppofed the circumcifion of Titus; evidently becaufe it was infifted on as neceffary to falvation, though Titus was a Gentile. On this ground, Paul would not confent to it, left the doctrine of juftification by faith in Jefus Chrift fhould appear to be denied or renounced *. He had the largeft views of Chriftian liberty, and was a zealous advocate for it; yet, in order to recommend the truth which he preached, he was willing to conform to the prejudices of others, in matters not effential. The cafe of Timothy was one inftance out of feveral, in which "unto the Jews he became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews †." We admire his meeknefs, felf-denial, and difinterefted regard to the credit and advancement of the Gofpel. Such compliances are truly honourable, and may greatly add to a perfon's ufefulnefs in the world. But let us take heed, left we pervert this example, by making conceffions clearly finful or of a dangerous tendency, or by yielding even in things lawful through covetoufnefs or ambition.

* Gal. ii. 3—5. † 1 Cor. ix. 20—23. See alfo Acts xxi. 21—24.

While

While Paul and his beloved companions travelled from place to place, and ſcattered the good ſeed, they ſaw the bleſſed fruits of their labours. Under their care the churches daily increaſed in numbers, and became more and more eſtabliſhed in the faith. Theſe meſſengers of Heaven were guided in their various removals, as well as in their preaching, by the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit. They opened their embaſſy in one diſtrict, where they were received as the Angels of God *, but were forbidden to do it in another, at leaſt for a ſeaſon. Having traverſed a large part of Aſia, and arrived at Troas, they collected from a viſion in the night, that they were called to croſs the water into Europe, and preach the Goſpel in Macedonia. They obeyed without reluctance or delay, being prepared to paſs over lands or ſeas, wherever the Lord ſhould mark out their courſe.

The firſt town of note, to which they came, was Philippi; and, during their continuance there, ſome occurrences happened, which demand particular attention. The ſacred hiſtorian minutely records the converſion of an individual, which proved the beginning of a large and proſperous church. On the ſabbath day they took the opportunity of addreſſing certain women, aſſembled together in a place ſet apart for prayer. Many, it ſhould ſeem, were preſent, but we read only of one perſon, named Lydia, who received real advantage. She liſtened with eagerneſs: "The Lord opened her heart." This favourable diſpoſition is, indeed, accounted for; but let us mark

* Gal. iv. 14, 15.

its

its influence and blessing. Immediately she felt the efficacy of the Gospel; both she and her family were baptized, and her house was opened for the accommodation of those, who had brought her the glad tidings of salvation. Ah! why is it, that others refuse even an attentive hearing? Because ignorance, prejudice, pride, and sensuality, render us all averse to such subjects. Our minds are, as it were, closed against the truth of God, and resist its admission. O let us pray, that the Lord would remove the obstruction, and open our hearts! Thus only will the doctrine of Christ find a ready entrance, and make a lasting impression.

How various are the methods of grace! Lydia, probably, was wrought upon in a gentle manner, without any strong terrors or violent emotions. But we proceed to consider another conversion, of a different sort, and one in which the hand of God was more visibly exerted. Some singular circumstances, which preceded, were evidently ordered by the divine providence with a view to this event.

A certain damsel at Philippi under a demoniacal possession, pretending to a power of divination, bore a public and repeated testimony to St. Paul and his associates, as the servants of the most high God, and teachers of the only way of salvation. The multitude might imagine from such an attestation, that she was in league with the preachers of the Gospel, and that they were all impostors of the same kind, equally deserving of neglect and contempt. That there might be no ground, however, for the suspicion, the Apostle commanded the evil spirit to depart. The damsel was a slave,

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and her owners had reaped large pecuniary advantages from her magical art. They now found, that their gain was at an end, and with great indignation dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates of the city, accusing them of sedition. Thus it frequently happens, that interested persons, whose dishonest profits are likely to suffer, bitterly inveigh against the zealous preachers and professors of our holy religion, and charge upon them that very disturbance, of which they themselves are the authors. By slanderous reproaches and malicious calumnies Satan and his agents may so far prevail, as to bring the faithful servants of God into temporary danger and distress.

The populace rose up with fury against these ambassadors of Christ. The magistrates themselves treated them most injuriously, condemned them without any fair examination, tore off their clothes, caused them to be scourged with many stripes, cast them into prison, and left them in the hands of an austere and inhuman jailer. He, too, as if he were glad of his commission, thrust them into one of the closest cells, and secured their feet in the stocks. Yet behold the situation and conduct of the servants of God! Where distress and dejection are usual, there we find them maintaining their wonted reliance on His power; where the heart of the stoutest commonly fails and is afraid, there they are rejoicing, and at peace. The darkness and horrors of the dungeon could not exclude the light of God's countenance: though their wounded bodies suffered sharp anguish, divine consolations flowed in upon their minds. At midnight they were heard to pray aloud

aloud and to ſing hymns of praiſe. Their caſe, then, may encourage us to "commit the keeping of our ſouls to God in well-doing," whatever dangers may threaten us. "In the fear of the Lord is ſtrong confidence: and his children ſhall have a place of refuge *." They poſſeſs a never-failing ſource of peace and joy, of which they cannot be deprived by ſtripes, chains, and tortures.

It ſoon appeared, that this painful diſpenſation was appointed to accompliſh the moſt gracious deſigns. The Lord interpoſed for the vindication and deliverance of his oppreſſed ſervants. While they were engaged in exerciſes of devotion, the earth trembled, the priſon was ſhaken to its foundation, the doors thrown open, and all the fetters of the priſoners inſtantly broken. In this awful ſcene, our attention is chiefly directed to the jailer. Alarmed and terrified, under an apprehenſion that all the perſons committed to him had eſcaped, he was about to diſpatch himſelf with his own ſword. Paul, however, knowing his purpoſe, happily diverted him from it: yet the alarm, given to his ſpirits, did not end here. Upon hearing the voice of the Apoſtle, the ſtout-hearted ſinner, overwhelmed with fear and conſternation, ran in, fell down at the feet of the very men, whom he had ſo lately treated with inſult and cruelty, and cried out in deep concern for his ſoul, "Sirs, what muſt I do to be ſaved?" Aſtoniſhing change indeed, accompliſhed by no leſs a power, than that which produced the miraculous convulſion of the earth!

* Prov. xiv. 26.

Paul

Paul and Silas could not but liften to his words with peculiar delight. They were ready to inftruct the enquiring penitent, and, forgetting their own ftripes, were moft eager to heal his wounded confcience. Immediately they preached Chrift to him and his family, affuring them that on their believing they fhould obtain falvation. The effect was wonderful. The jailer was converted, and, while by faith he committed himfelf to Jefus, divine peace and joy fprang up in his heart. How different, alfo, his outward behaviour, as well as his inward affections! He brought out Paul and Silas from their confinement, wafhed their lacerated bodies, and gave them food for their refrefhment: both he and his domeftics were baptized, and, probably, his houfe became a church for God. Thus the violent oppofition eventually promoted " the furtherance of the Gofpel." O why fhould you fear, if you are engaged in the caufe of God and his truth? But, if you are fighting againft Him, you cannot poffibly prevail, however ftrong may be your party, however fubtle and profound your fchemes.

In the morning, the magiftrates, probably terrified by the earthquake, ordered the prifoners to be difmiffed. But Paul, with the confidence of an upright man, remonftrated againft the injurious treatment they had received, and obferved that as Roman citizens they were entitled to peculiar privileges, and might demand fatisfaction. After this bold reprefentation, they obtained a proper conceffion from the officers, and an honourable difcharge. They did not rigoroufly infift

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on their rights, but ſhewed that they were men of peace; for, as ſoon as they had viſited and comforted the brethren, they quitted the town, leſt further tumult and diſturbance ſhould be excited. Such was the firſt planting of the church at Philippi, of which the moſt favourable teſtimony is given in the ſacred records: and from ſuch ſmall beginnings, under the bleſſing of our God, works of extenſive uſefulneſs often take their riſe.

Not diſcouraged by the violence they had met with, our Apoſtle and his aſſociates preſſed on to other ſervices. Having paſſed through ſome conſiderable cities in Macedonia, they came to Theſſalonica, a place of peculiar note *. There alſo, according to his cuſtom, St. Paul reſorted to the ſynagogue of the Jews, addreſſed his countrymen on the grand topics of the Goſpel, and proved from their own ſcriptures, that Jeſus is indeed the promiſed Meſſiah. Nor did he ſpeak in vain: many believed his report, and joined his company. But others ſoon diſcovered a different ſpirit. The Jews, who rejected his word, raiſed a violent and furious oppoſition: they collected certain low and profligate fellows, and threw the whole town into commotion. The houſe, where Paul lodged, was aſſaulted; and, though he eſcaped, Jaſon, who was his hoſt, and ſome of the brethren, were dragged before the magiſtrates, and accuſed as perſons diſaffected to the government, and as general diſturbers of the peace, who "had turned the world upſide down." The proſecution, indeed, was dropped, but it became

* Acts xvii. 1, &c.

necessary for Paul and Silas to fly from the place under cover of the night.

It may be asked, Is this the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ, which is every where spoken against, which causes divisions and animosities in families, towns, and neighbourhoods? Can that system, which breathes nothing but benevolence, and is calculated to promote universal happiness, be liable to such objections, and produce such consequences? Yes, these are the very calumnies, these the effects, which we are taught will usually attend the faithful declaration of the Gospel: but they are to be ascribed to the perverseness of its opposers, and not to the nature or tendency of its principles. We ought not, therefore, to be staggered in our belief or profession of the truth. Shall the ministers of Christ dread the resentment of the world? There is a way to avoid it: there is a method of preaching, which gives no disturbance. But is this the scheme, you would recommend? Would you have them accommodate their message to men's vitiated taste, and say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace?" Then, indeed, there might be no persecution; but the prospect hereafter would be tremendous: the deceived and the deceiver would perish together *.

St. Paul did not continue long at Thessalonica; but the fruits of his labours were glorious and lasting. His two Epistles to the church in that place, evidently shew that the Gospel prevailed and triumphed

* Matt. xv. 14.

in the midst of opposition. He speaks of the Christians there in higher terms, than of any other society. He thus writes; "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance: having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia *." How are the hands of ministers strengthened, and their hearts comforted, when they can give such an account of the people under their charge!

His letters, likewise, prove, how great was his tenderness among the Thessalonians, how strong his affection for them, how irreproachable his conduct. It should seem, that with difficulty he procured common provisions; or that he refused the offers of support from his friends, for the sake of recommending the Gospel by his disinterested spirit, and exhibiting a pattern of diligence. He "did not eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travel NIGHT AND DAY, that he might not be chargeable to any of them †." Sometimes he received relief from the Philippians: but this he neither sought nor desired ‡. What an example of generosity, patience, and self-denial, springing from the most exalted motives! Such were the lessons, which our Apostle had learned at the feet of Jesus §. Are we thus instructed? What have we been enabled to do, or relinquish, or

* 1 Thess. i. 5—7. † 2 Thess. iii. 8. ‡ Phil. iv. 16, 17. § Phil. iv. 11, 12.

endure,

endure, in the ſervice of Chriſt? Juſtly may we be aſhamed to mention our own difficulties, when we read thoſe of St. Paul.

After his departure from Theſſalonica, he fled to the neighbouring city of Berea, and there, alſo, opened his commiſſion in the ſynagogue of the Jews. The appearances were pleaſing: the people diſcovered a much nobler diſpoſition than the Theſſalonians. They were willing to hear, and with great diligence and ſeriouſneſs compared the Apoſtle's doctrines with the ſcriptures; nor do we wonder, that many embraced the Chriſtian faith. It challenges and deſerves enquiry, and to the humble and teachable, as it promiſes, ſo it communicates, knowledge and happineſs. Thoſe, who reject it, are generally too indolent or too bigotted, to give it a fair examination: and yet, with much arrogance, they call themſelves free-thinkers.

But the labours of St. Paul were ſoon cloſed at Berea. He was followed by the ſtorm, which had been raiſed at Theſſalonica. The Jews purſued him with indignation, and ſtirred up a violent commotion. It, therefore, became neceſſary for him once more to conſult his ſafety by flight; though Silas and Timothy, as being leſs obnoxious, ventured to continue there for a time, that they might carry on the work of God. Thus the oppoſition, as before, contributed to a more extenſive propagation of the Goſpel, and Satan defeated his own purpoſe. The unbelief and reſiſtance of ſome were the means of ſending ſalvation to many others.

Paul was conducted to Athens, a city the moſt ce-

lebrated for the ſtudy of philoſophy and all polite literature. But, even here, profound ignorance of God and ſtupid idolatries prevailed, evidently proving the Apoſtle's aſſertion, that "the world by wiſdom knew not God *." His mind was deeply affected by viewing the groſs ſuperſtitions of men, who boaſted of their ſuperior diſcernment. Though he poſſeſſed a fine taſte and improved underſtanding, he attended not to the learned curioſities and diſputations of the place, which as a ſcholar he might have reliſhed. But he felt a ſtrong deſire to correct the fatal errors univerſally received, and to diffuſe the knowledge of his God and Saviour. To this end he bore his teſtimony in various parts of that renowned city. His ſentiments, however, ſuited not the notions of proud philoſophers. They deſpiſed him as a trifling, contemptible fellow, a mere babbler, who had nothing to offer, deſerving of their notice. Others repreſented him as an advocate for certain foreign deities, when he preached Jeſus and the reſurrection. He was, therefore, ſummoned to anſwer for himſelf, and give an account of his doctrine before the high court, which aſſembled on the famous hill of Areopagus.

In ſuch a formidable ſituation our Apoſtle ſtood forth to declare the grand principles of true religion. His addreſs upon that occaſion was maſterly, and admirably adapted to the circumſtances and character of the audience. He began with an obſervation on their uncommon attention to the worſhip of inviſible beings, and ſaid, that in his view of their devotional rites he

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

had

had particularly remarked an altar, inſcribed "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." While they, therefore, evidently confeſſed their ignorance, he avowed himſelf ready to give them inſtructions, in this important ſubject. He then inſiſted on ſome of the perfections of that God, whom they knew not, the God of creation and the God of providence; and proved, by an appeal to his works and to the confeſſions of their own poets, that he is the maker, ſupporter, and governor of the world. From theſe principles he argued with great ſtrength againſt their idolatrous notions and practices. He affirmed, that this God had long borne with the folly of men, and ſuffered them to follow their own devices; but that repentance was now univerſally and indiſpenſably required by the authority of Heaven. He further enforced the duty by the awful conſideration of a day of future retribution and general judgment, of which, he declared, the Lord God had given an aſſurance by the reſurrection of the Saviour from the dead.

There was a peculiar wiſdom and dignity in the Apoſtle's addreſs: but it ſhould ſeem, that his audience interrupted him, juſt as he was entering on the moſt important topics. Conceited of their own erudition, they refuſed him a ſerious and patient hearing, and, as it frequently happens, rejected with a contemptuous ſneer what they could not confute. Amongſt many, however, who made light of his doctrine, there were ſome, who believed and ſhewed a ſtrong attachment to him; and, of theſe, one or two of conſiderable rank.

It is ſuppoſed, that there was ſcarcely any place, in which St. Paul met with ſo little ſucceſs, as in this celebrated city, among theſe accompliſhed ſcholars and acute philoſophers. Juſtly may we cry out, "Where is the wiſe? where is the ſcribe? where is the diſputer of this world? Hath not God made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world *?" In other ages and countries, many perſons, admired for their ſagacity and ſuperior attainments in learning, have been among the bittereſt oppoſers of the Goſpel. And no wonder, ſince this ſyſtem ſtrikes at the root of our pride, and can find admiſſion with thoſe only, who are willing to become fools, that they may be wiſe †. It is no argument againſt Chriſtianity, that it was rejected by theſe vain pretenders to ſcience at Athens: nay, their rejection of it can be readily explained. But it is a ſtrong evidence in its favour, that Paul was not afraid to propoſe and maintain it in ſuch a philoſophic city, and that ſome were brought over to his ſide.

Let us enquire, Who among ourſelves have cordially ſubmitted to the faith of Chriſt? It is worthy of the acceptation of the higheſt ranks: but if you, who fill an exalted place in ſociety, are diſpoſed to embrace the Goſpel, like Dionyſius and Damaris at Athens, how great are your obligations to that God, who has removed your prejudice and ſubdued your pride! Are there not ſome, who, with a ſhew of wiſdom, are obliged to confeſs, that they worſhip an unknown God? We entreat you to liſten to thoſe, who would

* 1 Cor. i. 20. † iii. 18.

declare

declare him unto you. Your paſt times have been "times of ignorance," notwithſtanding a ſuperſtitious performance of the formalities of devotion. O praiſe the Lord, who has been patient and long-ſuffering towards you; and now hear his voice, for he calleth you to repentance! We remind you of the final advent of the Saviour, and the ſolemnities of the univerſal judgment. Theſe things are too important to be diſmiſſed with a ſneer. Conſider them with fixed attention: believe, and be ſaved.

From Athens our Apoſtle proceeded to Corinth *. This large and flouriſhing city, which abounded in wealth and magnificence, was infamous, even to a proverb, for its general ſpirit of diſſipation. It might ſeem, therefore, an unlikely place for the reception of the Goſpel: but the miniſters of Chriſt muſt "preach to every creature," depending upon God to make his own word effectual. When He is pleaſed to ſend it forth as "the Rod of his ſtrength †," it accompliſhes great events. It is "mighty through God to the pulling down of ſtrong holds ‡." At Corinth a numerous ſociety of Chriſtians was gathered, as we may learn from the two Epiſtles addreſſed to that church; and ſome of theſe had once been of an abandoned character.

Here he met with two pious perſons, Aquila and his wife Priſcilla, who had lately been baniſhed from Rome for their religion. With them he took up his abode, and laboured for his ſupport, as a tent-maker; for they had all been inſtructed in the ſame occupation.

* Acts xviii. 1, &c. † Pſal. cx. 2. ‡ 2 Cor. x. 4.

At firſt, probably, this attention to his trade was abſolutely neceſſary; and afterwards he thought it expedient, that he might prevent or remove prejudices and objections, and prove that he ſought not his own eaſe or intereſt *. His grand aim was to ſpread the knowledge of divine truth, and to " win ſouls." On every ſabbath he ſtood forth in the Jewiſh ſynagogue as an advocate for the Goſpel. Eſpecially, when Silas and Timothy came to him from Macedonia, and enlivened him by their preſence and good account of the churches, he felt a peculiar earneſtneſs of ſpirit for the honour of his Maſter, and preached with freſh vigour. The Jews rejected his teſtimony, and blaſphemed the Lord Chriſt, whom he commended to their regard. He, therefore, ſolemnly warned them of their condemnation, charged their deſtruction upon their own heads, and then turned from them to the Gentiles. He no more renewed his inſtructions in their ſynagogue, but from that time addreſſed the people, who were diſpoſed to hear him, at the houſe of one Juſtus in the neighbourhood.

His labours were not ineffectual. Criſpus, a man of ſome rank as being " the ruler of the ſynagogue," and many of the Corinthians, alſo, came forth and made profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith. Yet it was a ſeaſon of diſtreſs with the Apoſtle; and it ſhould ſeem that he gave way to an improper dejection of mind. He declares, that he had been with them " in weakneſs, and in fear, and in much trembling †." A view

* 1 Cor. ix. 12—19. 2 Cor. xi. 7—12. † 1 Cor. ii. 3.

of

of the prevailing wickedneſs in that opulent city, a ſenſe of his own infirmities, the contempt with which both he and his doctrine were treated, and an apprehenſion of danger, combined probably to diſcourage him; and it appears, as if he were ready to take his flight, or decline his work. At that juncture the Lord graciouſly interpoſed, commanded him to perſiſt in his ſervice with diligence and intrepidity, and promiſed him the divine preſence, protection from enemies, and great ſucceſs in his miniſtry among the Corinthians. He thus addreſſed him in a viſion of the night, "Be not afraid, but ſpeak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man ſhall ſet on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this place."

St. Paul was imboldened, by this aſſurance from heaven, to continue at Corinth a year and ſix months, during which time he laboured in the Goſpel with much aſſiduity, and to good effect. There alſo he wrote his Epiſtles to the Theſſalonians, and, as ſome think, that to the Galatians. They were probably the firſt of his compoſitions now remaining. He forgot not the concerns of his diſtant brethren, but felt a painful anxiety for them, when he heard of certain inſtances of miſconduct and declenſion in the churches.

The faithful ambaſſadors of Chriſt may be inſtructed from the example before us. It is nothing wonderful, that they, like this eminent Apoſtle, ſhould be oppreſſed and diſcouraged by inward temptations as well as outward oppoſition. O let us not increaſe

their

their difficulties by our contempt or unkindneſs! Rather, let us ſtrengthen their hands in God, by our cordial reception of the truth, and pray for them, that they may be upheld, and aſſiſted in the vigorous proſecution of their important work. May much people be turned to the Lord, through their labours, in thoſe very places, which they conſider as moſt hopeleſs! In this they may be confident and rejoice, that, wherever their Maſter has appointed them a ſervice, He will continue and ſupport them; nor ſhall any violence of their enemies prevent or retard the purpoſes of his mercy.

At length a ſevere ſtorm aroſe at Corinth. The Jews were indignant: they ſeized the Apoſtle, and in an outrageous manner brought him before the tribunal of Gallio, the governor or proconſul of Achaia. They accuſed him of introducing a new religion, to the ſubverſion of the law; but their accuſation was rejected, and his defence forbidden, with equal contempt and diſregard of both. Gallio would hear nothing on the ſubject, and therefore inſtantly diſmiſſed the parties. He conſidered the Jews and their law, the Apoſtle and his Goſpel, as beneath his notice: they were left to ſettle, as they choſe, what was to him a frivolous contention: "he cared for none of thoſe things."

St. Paul remained there ſome time longer, notwithſtanding this ſtrong oppoſition. It was not the mere clamour of enemies, which could accelerate his departure. When the time came, he took with him his two friends, Aquila and Priſcilla: and it is remarked,

 that

that at Cenchrea, a neighbouring port, from which he set sail, he shaved his head in consequence of a certain vow he had made, probably for a great deliverance. When they arrived at Ephesus, he preached the word with his accustomed zeal, but soon left his dear companions there, though they earnestly requested him to continue. He "conferred not with flesh and blood," pressing on with unremitting ardour, wherever his duty called him. He hastened to Jerusalem, with charitable contributions for the church; and, having finished the purpose of his journey, he called at Antioch upon his return, and made some stay in that place. He then passed in a regular progress throughout the country of Galatia and Phrygia, with a view of propagating the Gospel yet more extensively, and encouraging believers under all their trials and distresses.

How honourable the employment of the Apostle! Happy those, who enjoyed the benefit, and knew the value of his labours! What a glory and excellency distinguished his character, while he travelled from one kingdom to another, "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*;" "as poor, yet making many rich†!" Instead of complaining of his arduous post, he was constrained to utter that grateful acknowledgment, "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place‡!"

Here again we pause, and ask, Will any maintain,

* Acts xxvi. 18. † 2 Cor. vi. 10. ‡ 2 Cor. ii. 14.

that

that Paul could be a deceiver? Could all these astonishing events, so exactly similar, which his preaching produced in different parts of the world, be the effect of mere fancy or delusion? Let infidels credit this, if they can. They will not, indeed, hesitate to admit any absurdities or impossibilities, rather than allow, that our religion is a revelation from heaven. But let us rejoice in the truth and efficacious influence of the Gospel; "for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth *." Let us not be satisfied with granting the sincerity, or even admiring the excellence, of the Apostle. Do we receive the doctrine, which he propagated? Does it regulate our faith and practice? We are not so much in danger of openly rejecting the whole system, as of trifling under an external profession, without experiencing "the power of godliness." O let us be afraid, lest the word, which we hear and pretend to believe, should rise up to condemn us in the judgment!

The Lord God set his seal to the declarations of his Apostle; and we do not hesitate to assert, that He continues to this day, in a most decided manner, to prosper the labours of those, who deliver the same testimony. Similar effects attend the promulgation of the simple and unadulterated Gospel. Many, like the Thessalonians, are hereby "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven †." Let us offer up our fervent prayers, that we may see more evident proofs among ourselves of a divine energy accompanying

* Rom. i. 16. † 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

the

the preaching of the crofs. We have many precious promifes, which fhould encourage our expectations of glorious events. Let thofe, who "have this miniftry, as they have received mercy, faint not *," but be unwearied in their exertions for the enlargement and profperity of the Church. May they be honoured of God, whom they ferve in the Gofpel of his Son, "by turning many to righteoufnefs," and then "fhine as the ftars for ever and ever †!" Amen.

* 2 Cor. iv. 1. † Dan. xii. 3.

AINT PAUL

SECT. 4.

Paul came to Ephesus—was driven away by a tumult of the people—visited Greece—returned to Troas—raised Eutychus to life—passed on to Miletus—there sent for the elders from Ephesus, and took his leave—at Tyre and Cesarea, was dissuaded from going to Jerusalem, but proceeded thither—complied with Jewish prejudices—assaulted by a mob—taken into custody of the Romans—addressed the people, but furiously opposed—arraigned before the Sanhedrim.

THE page of history has celebrated the characters of many, who shewed uncommon ardour in spreading devastation and misery, whilst they passed from kingdom to kingdom. Such were Alexander and Cesar; who, however illustrious their names have appeared, were no other than the oppressors and murderers of mankind. How different the Apostle of Christ! His wisdom, zeal, and courage, were superior to those of the most admired heroes; and the motives of his conduct were noble and excellent, but their's sordid and base. We observe him continually planning fresh schemes, and burning with eager desire, to carry the Gospel from nation to nation, in defiance of

of all difficulties and dangers: and it is obvious, that he was actuated, not by the prospect of temporal emolument, dominion, or any carnal gratification, but by the purest affection, of which the mind is susceptible, love to God and to the whole human race.

From what we have already seen of the extreme violence of persecution, to which St. Paul was exposed in the cause of Christ, it might be thought that he would soon be discouraged, and decline all further exertions. Doubtless, this would have been the case, had he not been upheld by a divine support, and animated by a full conviction of the truth and excellence of those doctrines, which he preached. But we shall still behold him pressing on to new services; like an undaunted conqueror, dissatisfied with former victories, and eager to subdue many more and far distant cities and kingdoms, whatever dangers or deaths might seem to obstruct his way.

A.D. 57. We left him, after his journey to Jerusalem, confirming the churches of Asia. That object being accomplished, he returned to Ephesus, a place of considerable note, but extremely addicted to idolatry and sensual excesses. Here he took up his abode for some time, and by his labours a large society of Christians was formed, to whom he afterwards addressed an invaluable Epistle, which is still extant.

Here he found certain disciples, instructed in the doctrine and baptism of John, yet not acquainted with that abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit, which had been granted as the blessed fruit and evidence

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of our Lord's aſcenſion *. But, by the impoſition of the Apoſtle's hands, the ſame miraculous influences were conferred on them, which other churches had received. Thus a glorious atteſtation was given to the Goſpel at Epheſus; and, probably, others were thereby induced to become obedient to the faith. There may be many ſincere believers, in a great meaſure ignorant of the extent of thoſe privileges, to which they are admitted in Chriſt Jeſus. We enquire of them, as Paul of the Epheſians, "Unto what were ye baptized?" and we exhort them to pray earneſtly, that they may be favoured with large communications of that light, and ſtrength, and comfort, which God hath promiſed, and is willing to beſtow upon his people.

The Apoſtle opened his commiſſion in the ſynagogue of the Jews, and endeavoured for three months together, by argument and perſuaſion, to bring them into ſubjection to the kingdom of God. But ſuch was the perverſeneſs of that people, that at length he declined all connection with them; and, removing from the ſynagogue to a public ſchool in the city, he there continued, for the ſpace of two years, to proſecute the great object of his miniſtry. During that period opportunity was given to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, as well as to the Epheſians, to hear his teſtimony; and the knowledge of ſalvation was diffuſed in an extenſive manner. It pleaſed God to confirm his doctrine by many ſurpriſing miracles: diſeaſes were inſtantly removed, and evil ſpirits diſpoſſeſſed.

* Acts xix. 1, &c.

Certain

Certain wandering Jews, pretending to the power of expelling demons, were desirous to imitate St. Paul, and accordingly, in their adjurations, made use of the name of Jesus. They had observed the wonders it had wrought, whilst they knew not its true efficacy, or were impelled by sinister motives to apply and pervert it. A remarkable instance of this kind occurred in the seven sons of a Jewish priest: they conspired together for the purpose, but were baffled in their scheme, and nearly destroyed by the man, whom they presumptuously attempted to cure. The Lord Christ is not to be trifled with. He will not give his sanction to the devices of hypocrites, and sooner or later will detect their perfidy. It is vain, it is dangerous, for those, who are strangers to his character and live in disobedience to his authority, to profess an attachment to his person. Though they may seem to take his part, in opposition to Satan, and to plead his cause, by writing or preaching in defence of the Gospel, they are not likely to succeed better than "the seven sons of Sceva." Their efforts, probably, will not avail for the deliverance of others, and will certainly turn to their own confusion.

The defeat of these arrogant pretenders to a connection with the Saviour engaged the public notice at Ephesus, and stamped greater credit upon the Gospel and the ministry of the Apostle. Men were struck with an awful regard for the Lord Jesus, and afraid of provoking him by dissimulation. Convinced of the sinfulness of their magical arts, they burned those very books, from which they had derived their

 former

former gains, and which they might then have sold for an immense sum. This was done in the open view of the town; and it is remarked as an evidence of the glorious efficacy and triumphant success of the Gospel. It is, indeed, "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds *." Where its power is felt, every profane practice will be renounced, and even the love of money will be subdued. Have we given such a proof of our submission to Christ? Are we willing to forsake those occupations and habits, though most profitable, which cannot be retained with a good conscience? Ah! how many reject the word of God and perish eternally, because they are determined to hold fast their unjust gains! "Fifty thousand pieces of silver," and the accustomed means of subsistence, were sacrificed by these Ephesians: let those, who are attached to the world, say, if that principle be not most potent, which can produce such uncommon effects.

During St. Paul's abode at Ephesus, he was not unmindful of his friends and brethren at a distance. He meditated fresh services in other places, and burned with an eager desire, not only to visit the churches, which were far separated from each other, but to carry the glad tidings of salvation even to Rome, the metropolis of the world. For the present, since he prolonged his stay, he sent as his substitutes, into Macedonia, two of his beloved companions, Timothy and Erastus. About this time, probably, he wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians, in which he mentions his

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

ſituation at Epheſus, as affording him opportunities of extenſive uſefulneſs, though attended with violent oppoſition: "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adverſaries *."

Satan may be expected to uſe his ſtrongeſt efforts, by ſtirring up his zealous agents to reſiſt the Goſpel, when his kingdom is ſhaken, and "the pillars thereof tremble." In moſt places there are ſome perſons, who, from their peculiar employments or connections in life, ſuppoſe their intereſt will be injured by the progreſs of true religion. Their chief emoluments, and even their ſubſiſtence, may ſeem to depend upon the folly and wickedneſs of others: and therefore, when the word of God comes with power, and turns men from their evil ways, theſe people, perceiving their "craft is in danger to be ſet at nought," will raiſe a grievous outcry.

This was the caſe at Epheſus. Demetrius, who derived large profits from the idolatrous worſhip of Diana, ſtirred up a furious mob againſt Paul and his companions. The Apoſtle would have ventured into the midſt of the tumult, to addreſs them on the ſubject; but he was prevailed on by his friends to conſult his ſafety: and his example teaches us, that a prudent regard to our own preſervation is conſiſtent with the warmeſt zeal.

At length, the town-clerk or recorder of the city appeaſed the violence of the multitude, which threatened very ſerious conſequences. He argued not on principles of religion, but, as a man whoſe natural diſ-

* 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

cretion ſuggeſted the neceſſity of moderation, perſuaded them through motives of intereſt to deſiſt from their outrageous proceedings. We perceive the hand of God even in ſuch events. "He ſtilleth the noiſe of the ſeas, and," what is equally untractable, "the tumult of the people *." His avowed enemies come forward to promote his purpoſes, when he is pleaſed to make uſe of them: he frequently influences thoſe, who bear no good will to Zion, to plead the cauſe of his ſervants. Let our dependence, then, be fixed upon him, and not upon an arm of fleſh.

With a reference, probably, to this uproar, the Apoſtle ſaid, "I have fought with beaſts at Epheſus †;" and again, "We were preſſed out of meaſure, above ſtrength, inſomuch that we deſpaired even of life: but we had the ſentence of death in ourſelves, that we ſhould not truſt in ourſelves, but in God which raiſeth the dead ‡." Ah! why do we ſhrink from danger, while we are engaged in the work of ſuch a Maſter? Let us contemplate the illuſtrious pattern before us, and be animated, by the view of his patience, faith, and courage, to endure to the end.

A.D. 60. It became expedient for Paul to quit his ſituation at Epheſus, and therefore, having taken an affectionate leave of the diſciples there, he directed his courſe to Macedonia §. Ever intent upon his work, he preached and exhorted from place to place, and thus paſſed on to the ſouthern parts of Greece. In the midſt of various diſtreſſes, inward

* Pſal. lxv. 7. † 1 Cor. xv. 32. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 8, 9. § Acts xx. 1, &c.

as

as well as outward, he profecuted his journey to Corinth: and, having spent three months in that neighbourhood, when he was prevented by a defign upon his life from embarking to Syria, he returned through Macedonia, and failed from Philippi to Troas. There he remained feven days, and on the firft day of the week delivered with peculiar energy an addrefs to the difciples, who were affembled for the celebration of the Lord's fupper. It fhould feem, that, as he was "ready to depart on the morrow," he was induced, under the thoughts of leaving them, to protract the fervice to an uncommon length: "he continued his fpeech until midnight." The more deeply our hearts are affected with divine things, and the ftronger are our impreffions of the love of Chrift, we fhall be more eagerly defirous both to declare and hear the glorious truths of the Gofpel. The men of the world may wonder and revile: but, while they devote days and weeks to the purfuit of vain pleafures, let us not think a few hours too much to be employed in fpiritual exercifes.

The Chriftians at Troas met in an upper room, and it is remarked by the hiftorian, that they had many lights: their religious affemblies, therefore, were not held in the dark, as fome have malicioufly infinuated. On the occafion now mentioned, a young man, inattentive probably to the Apoftle's exhortations, was overpowered with fleep, and, falling to the ground from the window in which he fat, was taken up dead. This circumftance produced confufion and diftrefs in the congregation, till St. Paul, having embraced the

body in faith and prayer, reſtored it to life. We lament, that there are among ourſelves ſuch numerous inſtances of drowſy worſhippers, perſons pretending, at leaſt, to join in the divine ordinances, but ſo liſtleſs and ſtupid, that much of the ſhort time allotted to the ſervice ſeems to be ſlumbered away. Some may plead their infirmities or the prolixity of the preacher; but the practice is not to be juſtified. It betrays a want of true ſpiritual vigour, and a ſad neglect, if not contempt, of God, which muſt be highly offenſive to Him. Who would not be afraid of falling down dead in ſuch a ſtate, and where no revival, like that of Eutychus, could be expected? Who does not tremble at the thought of being thus ſummoned to the tribunal of Heaven?

The Apoſtle reſumed his diſcourſe, and was not willing to part from his dear friends till break of day. They ſpent the whole night in ſweet communion with God and with each other. How rare an example of zeal and love! At length he left the place, and, for one ſtage at leaſt, choſe to travel on foot. He affected no pomp, and probably, in proſecuting his journey by himſelf, wiſhed to ſecure ſome time for retirement. At Aſſos he joined his companions, with whom he took ſhip, and, having touched at different towns on the ſea coaſt, came to Miletus. He haſtened to Jeruſalem, and therefore, that he might not be detained by the tender importunities of his Chriſtian brethren at Epheſus, he paſſed by that city. He ſent, however, for the elders of their church to Miletus, and addreſſed himſelf to them in a ſolemn and pathetic

manner,

manner, giving them his laſt charge, and ſuggeſting ſuitable inſtructions for the execution of their important office.

He appealed to their knowledge and obſervation of his conduct, for a proof of his integrity, meekneſs, diligence, and zeal, in the exerciſe of his miniſtry amongſt them. He reminded them of the fidelity and earneſtneſs with which he had preached, and of the grand ſubjects on which he had inſiſted, repentance and faith. He informed them, that he was going, under a ſtrong impulſe of the Spirit, to Jeruſalem, and, though ignorant of the event, had received poſitive and repeated aſſurances, that bonds and afflictions awaited him there. Yet he declared, that, far from being ſtaggered by the proſpect, he valued not life itſelf, provided he could finiſh his courſe with joy, and fulfil his miniſtry by an extenſive propagation of the Goſpel.

He affirmed, that they were then looking upon him for the laſt time, and exhorted them to conſider, that, as he had delivered to them the whole Chriſtian ſyſtem without reſerve, he ſhould ſtand acquitted before God, whatever might become of the people for whom he had laboured, and that they muſt anſwer for their own ſouls. He charged them, therefore, to maintain a conſtant care over themſelves and every part of the flock committed to them, remembering from whom they had received their appointment, and how dear to God was that Church, "which He had purchaſed with his own blood." He warned them of falſe and deſtructive teachers, who would

 ſoon

ſoon ariſe and excite diſturbances, and preſſed upon them the duty of unceaſing vigilance. He then commended them all to God and to the word of his grace, expreſſing the moſt earneſt deſires for their ſpiritual advancement and final ſalvation, and propoſed for their imitation his own example of diligence, diſinteieſtedneſs, ſelf-denial, and benevolent attention to the poor.

The ſeparation was truly affecting. Upon his bended knees he offered up his fervent ſupplications for them, whilſt they with many tears wept over him and embraced him. We wonder not at their diſtreſs, as they were aſſured, that they ſhould ſee his face no more, no more be favoured with his miniſtrations, his counſels, or prayers. They accompanied him to the ſhip, to bid him the laſt farewell, and then, as it were by violence, he was torn from them,

May we not aſk, Is there any thing in this addreſs like the language of an impoſtor? Do we not perceive the cleareſt marks of an upright man, and of a meſſenger from Heaven? O that all the ambaſſadors of Chriſt may partake of his ſpirit, be leſs attentive to the world, and more mindful of their important office! O that, like him, they may feel a generous concern for the people of their charge, and be ſolicitous to feed them with the wholeſome doctrines of God's word! May Jeſus, their exalted Lord, endue them with all neceſſary wiſdom, ſtrength, and zeal, and proſper their exertions for his own glory! May he teach and enable them to "take heed unto themſelves and to all the flock!" So will they "not ſhun

to declare all the counſel of God," and, when they cloſe their ſervices on earth, it will inſpire them with gratitude and joy, to be aſſured that they are "pure from the blood of all men."

Paul ſailed from Miletus, and, having paſſed by ſeveral places, landed at Tyre, where he found ſome dear followers of the Saviour, and continued with them ſeven days *. In that city certain perſons, under a prophetic impulſe, warned him of danger, and entreated him not to proceed to Jeruſalem. But, being confident that duty called him, he did not ſhrink from his purpoſe. Having taken a ſolemn leave of his friends, with whom he was not aſhamed to kneel down in prayer upon the ſea ſhore, he purſued his journey. He ſtopped to pay his reſpects to the Chriſtians at Ptolemais, and then advanced to Ceſarea, where he was gueſt to Philip the Deacon and Evangeliſt.

There he received more expreſs information of the difficulties, which awaited him: Agabus foretold, that he ſhould be bound, impriſoned, and delivered over to the Roman power. He was therefore moſt earneſtly deſired by his companions in travel, as well as by the brethren at Ceſarea, to give up his intentions of viſiting Jeruſalem. But, as no dangers could intimidate his mind, he would not yield to their entreaties. Had he, then, no regard for his friends? Yes; and on that account he felt a ſevere conflict. He was not afraid to meet perils and death; but he could not bear to ſee thoſe, whom he loved, overwhelmed with diſtreſs. He cried out, "What mean ye to

* Acts xxi. 1, &c.

weep,

weep, and to break mine heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." This shews, that he possessed the tenderest affections, and that he determined to persevere in his purpose, only from a supreme regard to the Saviour, whom he served. The sorrowful supplicants desisted, and with humble submission referred the event to God.

Does not a sense of our indolence and timidity cover us with shame, while we contemplate St. Paul's unwearied exertions and willingness to lay down life itself in his Master's cause? Do we not value our friends, our ease, liberty, and safety, far more than the honour and favour of Christ? If his love constrain us, in any measure as it did the Apostle, why do we betray so much hesitation and reluctance in pursuing the plainest path of duty, merely because certain difficulties seem to obstruct our progress?

St. Paul, then, arrived at his journey's end, and took up his abode at Jerusalem with Mnason, an old disciple. There he met with a cordial reception from the church; and, having seized the earliest opportunity of visiting St. James, he related to him, in the presence of all the elders, how the work of God had been carried on by his ministry among the Gentiles. His account excited their gratitude and joy; but they warned him, that, glorious as his success had been, the strongest prejudices prevailed in his Jewish brethren against him. It was generally understood, that he every where encouraged the Jews to neglect and forsake the Mosaic law. They advised

vifed him therefore, with the view of filencing objectors, to join himfelf publicly with four perfons, who were bound by a particular vow to certain ritual obfervances, and to fubmit to all the ceremonies, appointed for fuch a purpofe. The Apoftle complied, not through a finful fear, or a temporizing fpirit, but in order that he might not wound any weak confciences, and, by conforming in matters merely indifferent, might gain the more to the love and fervice of Chrift.

Such was his condefcending and tender regard to the infirmities and miftakes of others. But how culpable was that hafty and uncharitable difpofition, by which many thoufand believers were ready to take up an exception againft a character, fo eminent and fo honoured as St. Paul! Shall we wonder, when we perceive fomething of the fame vehemence and bigotry among Chriftians in our own day? Yet, furely, we fhould lament, that, through mifconception and rafh judgment, they are frequently inclined to fufpect and condemn each other. And we ought to beware for ourfelves, left we entertain or receive an unfavourable opinion of a brother, without juft grounds.

Paul had begun to comply with the ceremonial inftitutions in the temple; when fuddenly a violent tumult was raifed by certain Jews from Afia, who with great impetuofity exclaimed againft him, as an enemy to their nation and religion. By their bafe mifreprefentations the people were excited to fuch a degree of rage, that the whole city was thrown into confufion, and the Apoftle expofed to imminent dan-

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ger. They ſeized and beat him, and were actually meditating his death, when Lyſias, the Roman officer, interpoſed with an armed body, and reſcued him out of their hands. It was with extreme difficulty, even then, that he eſcaped their fury. At the command of the captain, the ſoldiers bound him, and conducted him as a priſoner and a malefactor into the caſtle, while the infatuated mob cried out, "Away with him."

Are we not conſtrained to lament the contumelious uſage and confinement of this eminent ſervant of Chriſt? We may be diſpoſed to aſk, why the Lord ſhould permit thoſe, who are dear to himſelf, to be ſo inſulted and oppreſſed, and the moſt zealous advocates for his cauſe to be prevented from proſecuting their ſchemes of uſefulneſs in his Church. But alas! we are ſhort-ſighted creatures, and ſhould not preſume to cenſure or comprehend the conduct of Jehovah. "His way is in the ſea, and his path in the great waters, and his footſteps are not known *." Yet we are aſſured, that theſe very afflictions, which for a ſeaſon cut off the Apoſtle from the public exerciſe of his miniſtry, eventually promoted the advancement of the Goſpel †. Our fears for the ſafety of the ark are groundleſs. Let us cheerfully leave the care of it to God, and commit ourſelves and the concerns of all his people to his ſovereign diſpoſal. Whatever unfavourable or painful circumſtances may ariſe, let us look in faith and prayer for a happy iſſue.

* Pſal. lxxvii. 19. † Phil. i. 12—14.

St.

St. Paul was now in chains, but before he was committed to prifon, he obtained permiffion of the captain to addrefs the people in his own defence *. He began with declaring his extraction, education, and manner of life, and appealed to them who had known him, for a proof of his former hatred and violent perfecution of the Gofpel. He delivered a minute account of his converfion, of the Apoftolic commiffion he had received from Chrift to preach among all nations, and of the injunction given him in a trance to depart from Jerufalem. He had wifhed to continue in that city, expecting that his miniftry would be particularly fuccefsful among thofe, who had been witneffes of his oppofition to the faith. But Jefus, by his fovereign authority, commanded him to carry the meffage of peace to the Gentiles at a diftance.

This open and ingenuous narrative of the Apoftle feemed well calculated to imprefs the minds of the audience. His boldnefs in maintaining the Gofpel before them, who had once known him as a blafphemer and a perfecutor, is a ftrong evidence of its truth. But, though they could not deny his affertions, they were not convinced. The moft ftriking facts, the moft folid reafoning, and eloquent perfuafions, will not be fufficient to fubdue the human heart, unlefs God himfelf put forth his power, and make ufe of them for that purpofe.

The Jews liftened to the preacher, till he mentioned his miffion to the Gentiles; but this they

* Acts xxii. 1, &c.

could

could not bear. Such was their contempt and hatred of all other people, that they concluded a teacher from Heaven would never be ſent among the Heathen nations. The pretenſion appeared to them little ſhort of blaſphemy. They ſhewed every mark of indignation and abhorrence; tore off their clothes, and caſt duſt into the air, crying out, "Away with ſuch a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he ſhould live." Then indeed he was "made as the filth of the earth, and the off-ſcouring of all things *." If we likewiſe ſhould meet with the moſt injurious treatment, let us not wonder or complain, when we perceive with what outrageous violence this man of God was rejected.

The Roman captain ſecured him, and, not underſtanding the ground of the oppoſition, ſuppoſing that he muſt have committed ſome great offence, commanded him to be examined by ſcourging, that a confeſſion might be extorted. But Paul eſcaped the cruel torture, by pleading his privilege as a Roman citizen; and it ſhould ſeem that the officer had exceeded his authority in binding him. Lyſias, however, was deſirous to obtain clearer information of the buſineſs, and therefore, on the day following, convened the great council of the Jews for the trial of the priſoner according to their particular cuſtoms. There, for the preſent, we leave him, arraigned before the Sanhedrim, the object of their profane deriſion and contempt, yet not afraid of their terror, nor aſhamed of the name of Jeſus, in whom he believed.

* 1 Cor. iv. 13.

How

How much may we learn from this example! When we look at his patient perſeverance in the ſervice of Chriſt, and reflect on our own inactivity, well may we cover our faces, and hide them in the duſt. How little are any of us doing, in compariſon of this zealous Apoſtle! And ſhall we not be animated, by a view of his conduct, to be more bold and vigorous, while we maintain our profeſſion of the Goſpel againſt all its oppoſers? Liſten not to the fooliſh repreſentations of thoſe, who would perſuade you, that all fervour in religion is hypocriſy, fanaticiſm, or madneſs, and that every thing, better than lifeleſs formality, is an unneceſſary ſtrictneſs, a weak ſcrupuloſity, or a dangerous innovation. If you would be governed by the faſhionable principles of the age, you muſt keep at a diſtance from the leaſt imitation of St. Paul, and, wherever you diſcover a reſemblance of his ſpirit, you muſt condemn it as a ridiculous preciſeneſs. You muſt give up all earneſt contention for right doctrines, and all the ardour of devotion; you muſt affirm that faith is nothing but fancy, and laugh at the mention of ſpiritual peace, and communion with God through the Holy Ghoſt, as a vain deluſion. O how much better is it to ſuffer like the Apoſtle in defence of the truth, than thus to ſacrifice conſcience to intereſt or reputation!

But, if you are the moſt lively, diligent, and uſeful members of the Church, the brighteſt ornaments of the Chriſtian profeſſion, you may learn from St. Paul to place no dependence on your own attainments. Like him, you ſhould preſerve a conſtant ſenſe of your unworthineſs,

worthineſs, and aſcribe all the excellency of your beſt principles and performances to the ſanctifying influence of God's Spirit. When he conſidered, what talents he poſſeſſed, and what an eminent ſtation he filled, his humble and devout acknowledgment was, "I am nothing:"—"not I, but the grace of God which was with me *." He renounced even his uncommon labours and extenſive ſervices, as of no avail in the point of acceptance with God: he gloried only in the croſs of Chriſt, as procuring pardon and peace, and exulted as being "complete in Him." It will be difficult, we allow, conſidering your corrupt nature, to exert yourſelves to the utmoſt for the advancement of truth and righteouſneſs, and yet with unfeigned humility to caſt all your works at the feet of Jeſus, truſting wholly in the efficacy of his ſacrifice and the merit of his obedience. But no otherwiſe can you maintain any well-grounded hope towards God. Your moſt admired duties, if not done in faith, will be rejected with abhorrence, and it will be ſaid at the laſt, "Who hath required theſe at your hands?"

May the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, therefore, be exalted in our eſtimation, as "the end of the law for righteouſneſs!" With his holy Apoſtle, may we "rejoice in Him, and have no confidence in the fleſh!" Amen.

* 2 Cor. xii. 11. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

SAINT

SAINT PAUL.

SECT. 5.

Paul made his defence before the Sanhedrim—encouraged by a vision—conspired against—sent to Cesarea—there pleaded his cause before Felix, and afterwards before Festus—appealed to Cesar—brought, and permitted to be his own apologist, before king Agrippa.

It was predicted by our Lord, that his Apostles should be brought before governors and kings for his sake *: but it does not appear, that any of them was called to this honour, so much as St. Paul. The great men of the earth, indeed, shewed no desire to be acquainted with his doctrine, nor was he admitted to audience in his proper character, as an ambassador from Heaven; but he was conducted into their presence as a criminal. How mysterious are the ways of Providence! Paul was cast into bonds, in order that he might declare the truth of the Gospel to magistrates and princes. We shall now behold him in this very situation, arraigned before powerful and malicious enemies, yet, without timidity or painful anxiety for himself, most earnestly solicitous to save the souls of his hearers. O for the same bold and disinterested spirit in all the ministers of Christ! This would be

* Matt. x. 18.

 the

the brighteſt ornament of their profeſſion, and the ſtrongeſt recommendation of the religion, which they preach.

The Apoſtle was a priſoner at Jeruſalem, in the cuſtody of Roman ſoldiers. He had been with difficulty reſcued out of the hands of a Jewiſh mob, which was incenſed againſt him; and, the Sanhedrim being ſummoned for his trial, he proceeded to make his defence. He maintained before the council the integrity of his heart and conduct, though he had been apprehended and accuſed as a criminal *. His countenance, as well as his ſpeech, betokened a holy firmneſs and intrepidity, the effect of conſcious innocence, and the animating influences of the divine Spirit. The high prieſt, the preſident of the court, commanded him, in violation of all the forms of juſtice, to be ſmitten on the mouth, evidently ſhewing a determination to ſilence him, or to hear nothing in his favour. The Apoſtle, however, not intimidated by ſuch violent and injurious uſage, reprehended his judge, and ſolemnly declared that God would ſhortly puniſh him for his baſe hypocriſy. It ſeems, that there was an improper warmth of temper in the reproof: Paul immediately acknowledged, that he was not aware of directing his cenſure againſt the high prieſt. The intemperate exerciſe of power was with him no argument for reſiſtance to authority, or diſreſpect to office. Yet, doubtleſs, he ſpake by a prophetic impulſe; and, according to his ſentence, God did ſoon afterwards "ſmite that whited wall" by a ſingular deſtruction.

* Acts xxiii. 1, &c.

The

The example, as it ought not, so it cannot be pleaded in justification of insolence or resentment towards magistrates: St. Paul himself was solicitous to guard against such an abuse of his conduct. He felt and bowed in submission to the command of the scriptures, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people *." Be it our concern to "live in all good conscience before God;" and then let us meekly commit to him the event of groundless and malicious accusations.

A prudent device of the Apostle disconcerted the measures of his adversaries for that time. He perceived, that the assembly consisted partly of Pharisees, and partly of Sadducees, who differed widely in their sentiments, especially concerning the resurrection of the dead. He therefore declared himself attached to the sect of the Pharisees, and affirmed that for his defence of their leading doctrine he then stood arraigned before them. As many as were of this persuasion, immediately shewed an inclination to favour him, and proposed his dismission. But so warm were the debates occasioned by the subject, which he had started, that the council was thrown into the utmost confusion. The Roman officer began to fear for the safety of his prisoner, and, that he might not suffer through the fierceness of the disputants, interposed with an armed force for his deliverance, and conducted him back again to the castle. The Lord secures his people, amidst violent opposition, by various ways. Sometimes he protects them, by permitting their enemies

* Exod. xxii. 28.

to be divided and incenſed againſt each other. The hatred and variances amongſt wicked men are frequently ſo great, that they cannot unite in any ſchemes for perſecuting the Church, as otherwiſe they would. Thus "the wrath of man ſhall praiſe God," and promote the purpoſes of his ſovereign pleaſure.

Our Apoſtle remained in cloſe confinement, diſtreſſed, probably, by gloomy apprehenſions, as if he were cut off from all further opportunities of uſefulneſs. The following night, however, the Lord graciouſly appeared in a viſion to encourage and animate him, by an aſſurance that he ſhould ſtill continue his labours in the Goſpel, and bear his teſtimony even at Rome, the imperial city. How tender are the compaſſions of our God towards his afflicted people! In general, when their troubles increaſe upon them, "their conſolation alſo aboundeth by Chriſt *." What, then, have they to fear? Or, what can man do againſt them? If the Lord declare his approbation, and ſay to them, as he did to Paul, "Be of good cheer," they ſhould account it a ſufficient compenſation for their ſevereſt perſecutions, and be imboldened to face a hoſt of enemies.

Freſh dangers awaited the Apoſtle at Jeruſalem. Such was the fury of his oppoſers, that more than forty of them entered into an impious combination, and bound themſelves under a curſe to take away his life. Even the chief prieſts and elders concurred in the murderous deſign. But, though the horrid plan might ſeem to be well concerted, it was detected and defeated

* 2 Cor. i. 5.

by

by the Providence of God. A young man, nearly related to St. Paul, being apprized of the ſcheme, carried information of it to the Roman officer; in conſequence of which the priſoner was immediately removed, and ſent under a ſtrong guard to Ceſarea. His accuſers, alſo, were commanded to follow him, that the matter might there be fairly inveſtigated before Felix the governor.

It may appear ſtrange, that one, whoſe heart glowed with benevolence and a deſire of promoting univerſal happineſs, ſhould be purſued with ſuch malignity and rage, as if he had been the vileſt of his ſpecies and the peſt of ſociety. But in the oppoſition, which was made to him and other eminent ſaints, a ſtriking proof of human depravity is exhibited. Whilſt they were treated with contempt and abhorrence, for righteouſneſs' ſake, it is obvious that the God, whom they ſerved, was deſpiſed and hated: and indeed, this enmity of the carnal mind againſt God is the grand ſource and cauſe of perſecution, whatever may be pretended. But ſhall the faithful followers of Chriſt be intimidated? No: it is their privilege to maintain peace and joy, in dependence on their Almighty Redeemer. But "they that hate the righteous ſhall be deſolate." Their wiſeſt plans ſhall turn to their own confuſion. While they "take counſel together,—He that ſitteth in the heavens ſhall laugh; the Lord ſhall have them in deriſion *." Paul was reſcued from his furious adverſaries at Jeruſalem, by the very conſpiracy for his deſtruction. "They thruſt ſore at him, that he might

* Pſal. ii. 2, 4.

 fall;

fall; but the Lord helped him *." Let others be encouraged from his case. "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee †."

St. Paul was secured in Herod's palace at Cesarea, till his accusers came. After a few days, the high priest and other members of the Sanhedrim, with Tertullus, an insidious counsellor, at their head, appeared against him, and produced their charge before Felix ‡. The orator addressed the Roman governor in terms of the basest flattery, complimenting him upon the wisdom and excellency of his administration, though he was notoriously infamous for his oppression. He then inveighed against the prisoner, as having excited a seditious spirit through the whole body of the Jews, polluted their temple, and taken the most active part in spreading the principles of the Nazarenes, who were universally detested.

The Apostle, being permitted to answer in his own defence, protested his innocence, and challenged them to prove their allegations. He acknowledged, indeed, that his religious conduct was what they deemed heretical, but maintained that it was conformable to the ancient scriptures, in which he had been educated, and that his hope of a general resurrection was no other, than what they themselves allowed. He declared, that he uniformly endeavoured to discharge his duty both to God and men, that his journey to Jerusalem had been undertaken for the purposes of charity and devotion, and that his appearance in the temple had not

* Psal. cxviii. 13. † Isa. xii. 6. ‡ Acts xxiv. 1, &c.

been attended with any irregular or tumultuous proceedings. He, therefore, called upon his prosecutors to produce their evidence.

It is not probable, that you, who serve the Lord Christ, will escape unjust and malicious censures, whatever prudence or benevolence you may possess. Perhaps, the way, in which you worship God, may be reproached as heresy: but be not deterred by an ignominious name. It may be expedient, on certain occasions, to vindicate your principles and conduct: for that end you should be furnished with arguments; and, if you are truly upright with God, you also, like the Apostle, may be "bold as a lion" in the presence of your accusers. Only be you solicitous "to have always a conscience void of offence," that you may not provide them with objections, or give them any real advantage against you. But, if your own hearts condemn you, and the charges of your enemies be well founded, what shall we say? Though others attempt to justify and protect you, you will be a terror to yourselves, ready to flee, "when no man pursueth *."

What, then, was the issue of the trial? Felix deferred the cause to another hearing, that he might obtain clearer information. He so far, however, favoured the prisoner, as to allow him some degree of liberty, and permit him to receive the communications and visits of his friends. Nor was this the only privilege he met with, under his oppression and confinement. Whilst he was in that situation Paul was even called on to declare and maintain the Christian faith before this

* Prov. xxviii. 1.

wicked governor and his adulterous wife Drusilla. They shewed some desire to be acquainted with the doctrine of this extraordinary preacher: yet their motive, probably, was mere curiosity, which the Apostle did not endeavour to gratify. He aimed not to amuse them, but to fix an arrow of conviction in their consciences. Regardless of the event, as to himself, he addressed them with peculiar solemnity on subjects, which seemed calculated to awaken in them a sense of guilt, and to alarm their fears. "He reasoned of righteousness" before the man, who had practised extreme injustice and oppression; "of temperance" and chastity before those, who were then living in a state of incontinency, "and of judgment to come," that they might be excited to prepare for that awful account, which must be rendered at the tribunal of heaven.

Are we not astonished at the boldness of the Apostle, who endeavoured to bring his dignified hearers to repentance, rather than conciliate their favour and exculpate himself? But is not this the spirit, which all the ministers of the Gospel should possess? Without any dread of consequences, they should declare to the most exalted personages their guilt and danger, and, instead of using flattering speeches, "warn them to flee from the wrath to come." Who will not acknowledge the propriety of such an address? The careless and abandoned are often constrained to feel the force of divine truth. The haughty judge trembled under the words of the prisoner, and therefore hastened to close the interview. His heart was wounded within him, and he could not conceal

its horrors. But alas! unhappy man! he wiſhed not to purſue the conſideration of the painful ſubject; and yet he was not ſo obdurate, as to determine finally to relinquiſh all thoughts of religion. He endeavoured to pacify his conſcience, by pleading his numerous engagements at that time, and promiſing a ſerious attention to the preacher at "a convenient ſeaſon."

Did that ſeaſon ever come? Alas! no: He reſiſted his convictions; and, while they were ſtifled, they could not be productive of good effects. Afterwards, indeed, he frequently heard the Apoſtle, and entered into converſation with him; but we do not read, that he trembled any more. He was actuated by covetouſneſs, and, inſtead of enquiring for ſalvation, ſought to obtain a bribe, for which he would have releaſed the priſoner. But, as he failed in that attempt, he retained him in cuſtody, though no crime had been proved againſt him; and even after two years, when he was recalled from his government, he ſtill left him in bonds, merely that he might recommend himſelf to the Jews. What complicated iniquity was this! How lamentable, that the deep impreſſions, made upon his heart, ſhould ſerve only to aggravate his guilt!

O ſinners, beware, how you trifle with your convictions, when you are awakened to a ſenſe of your miſery by the faithful declarations of God's word! Like Felix, perhaps, you may be inclined to diſmiſs the preacher, and turn away from thoſe offenſive ſubjects, by which your conſciences are alarmed. Are you reſolved, then, to caſt off all thoughts of God and eternal things? No: you hope that at ſome future op-

portunity

portunity you ſhall be more at liberty to attend to your ſpiritual concerns. Ah! Sirs, what means this procraſtination? Is not your ſhort life haſtening to a cloſe? Is not judgment approaching? May you not be ſuddenly called to the tribunal of heaven? Or, may you not, by your unwillingneſs to ſubmit, provoke God to leave you to your own devices, and to ſay in righteous indignation, "Let them alone?" To what other ſeaſon are you looking forwards? Or what can be ſo convenient as the preſent? Do not, therefore, delay the important buſineſs. Yield to your convictions: ſtop not your ears againſt the truth, but deſire to feel its full influence; and ſoon will your horrors and diſtreſſing apprehenſions give place to the livelieſt emotions of hope and joy.

A. D. 62. St. Paul was left at Ceſarea, and the rage of his enemies had not yet ſubſided. Feſtus ſucceeded to the government of Judea, and, upon his going to Jeruſalem, received a powerful application againſt the priſoner from the members of the Sanhedrim *. They petitioned, that he might be ſent for to Jeruſalem, and intended to murder him by the way. But the ſcheme was defeated. Through the ſecret influence of God upon his mind, Feſtus would not comply with the requeſt. He commanded the accuſers to attend him to Ceſarea, where he himſelf propoſed to hear and decide the cauſe. There the trial was inſtituted, and Paul once more put upon his defence. The ſame groundleſs and malicious charges were brought againſt him, as before; and he, with his

* Acts xxv. 1, &c.

uſual

usual intrepidity, persisted in asserting his innocence. Still justice was denied him. The governor was disposed not only to trifle, but even to give him up to his enemies; for he proposed, that, according to their request, the matter should be referred to the council at Jerusalem.

What, then, could the Apostle expect from such arbiters? He saw through the design, and refused to submit. He declared his readiness to suffer extreme punishment, if he had deserved it, but maintained that he had done no wrong. As a Roman citizen, therefore, he claimed the privilege of being tried before the Emperor, and boldly appealed unto Cesar. This appeal, which stopped or suspended all further proceedings in the lower courts of the empire, was not the effect of cowardice: he did not shrink from bonds or death itself. But he has taught us, that it may be expedient for a Christian to assert his civil rights, and demand the protection and immunities, which the laws of his country allow him. We should, however, beware of a petulant and litigious spirit: the example before us will not justify a wanton opposition to government, or a propensity to contend for every little grievance.

It was determined, then, that the cause should be submitted to Cesar's decision, and Paul sent as a prisoner to Rome. Thus his desire of visiting that city was granted, and the divine promise fulfilled, though, probably, in a very different way from what he had expected. But, before he stood in the presence of the Emperor, another opportunity was given him for declaring the truths of the Gospel to certain personages

of

of exalted rank; and on that occasion he bore, as usual, an honourable testimony.

King Agrippa, who possessed a large extent of dominion under the Romans, and his sister Bernice, with whom it is supposed that he lived in a state of incestuous commerce, came together to pay their respects to the new governor Festus. During their continuance at Cesarea, they were made acquainted with the cause of the Apostle. Festus informed them, on what grounds he had detained this remarkable prisoner in bonds; but, in his relation, he evidently treated with contempt the Gospel, which Paul preached, as consisting of unmeaning and superstitious questions concerning one Jesus, who was dead and yet was affirmed to be alive. Alas! it is obvious, from their confused accounts, that men do not seriously attend to the doctrines of Christianity. They, who feel not the importance of eternal things, trifle with the most solemn declarations of God's word: possibly, they may consider even the death and resurrection of Christ as an uninteresting story, and of dubious authority. How different are the sentiments of the real believer! With what fixed regard and lively joy does he listen to those, who testify of the crucified and risen Saviour! This is the subject, with which, above all others, he wishes to be acquainted.

Agrippa desired to hear the singular preacher, of whom Festus spoke; and the next day was appointed for that purpose. The court was summoned; the illustrious personages, together with the principal officers of the army and inhabitants of the city, attended:

tended: and Paul was brought forth to make his defence. When the cause had been opened by Festus, Agrippa intimated to the prisoner, that he would be allowed the full liberty of pleading for himself*. And now our eyes are turned to the Apostle, and we are solicitous to observe, how he acquits himself in such an assembly. In this difficult situation he shines with peculiar lustre, and exhibits the most striking proofs of wisdom, courage, faithfulness, and zeal. Here we contemplate the Christian orator, addressing his noble auditors with graceful eloquence, with evident marks of politeness and learning, yet with an artless simplicity, with a tender and affectionate concern for their everlasting salvation. He was anxious to recommend the Gospel, rather than himself, to their favourable regard. Agrippa being his principal hearer, to him chiefly was this admirable speech directed.

The Apostle, stretching forth his hand, that he might engage attention by his respectful and earnest manner, declared that he rejoiced in the opportunity of entering on his own vindication before so competent a judge, who was acquainted with the scriptures and customs of the Jews. Having requested a patient audience, he proceeded to state what he had once been as a Pharisee, and what hope he then possessed as a Christian. He alleged, that this hope towards God through the Saviour, which was the subject of promise to the ancient fathers, and the professed expectation and desire of all the Jewish tribes, had been the sole ground of his prosecution. He adverted to the

* Acts xxvi. 1, &c.

doctrine of a resurrection, and the absurdity of rejecting it as incredible, and yet intimated that none could be more prejudiced against that or any other truth, than he had formerly been against the whole system of the Gospel. He enlarged upon his enmity and bitter opposition to the Christian name, and gave a particular relation of that miraculous vision, in which Jesus had appeared from heaven, subdued his rebellious spirit, and commissioned him to go forth among the Gentiles, as a preacher of the grand mysteries of redemption. He affirmed, that, for his obedience to that mandate, his countrymen were violently incensed, and attempted his life. He devoutly ascribed to God his continued support in the discharge of his sacred function to that day; and maintained that Moses and the prophets predicted, what he taught, the death and resurrection of the Redeemer, and the offer of light and salvation, founded on those events, to the Jew first, and then to the benighted Heathen.

St. Paul evidently considered his own conversion, not only as a singular display of divine mercy, but as an incontestable proof of the truth of Christianity; and therefore he was ready upon every occasion to propose it to the notice of others, for the honour of his God and Saviour. And surely the account sufficiently justifies his conduct. Do we not allow, that he acted a reasonable and wise part, in renouncing his former errors and becoming a strenuous advocate for Christ? But are we willing to follow his example, as far as the difference of our circumstances will permit? What means our commendation of this

illustrious character, if we dislike those sentiments, tempers, and practices, which constituted its chief excellence?

The effect of the Apostle's address upon two of his principal hearers deserves our regard. Festus, considering the doctrines asserted as abstruse and ridiculous, or as enthusiastic jargon, concluded that the preacher, if an honest man, must certainly be deranged in his senses, though he allowed him the credit of being a scholar. He therefore interrupted the discourse, and cried aloud, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." The same objection has been often urged against all those, who zealously contend for the grand, distinguishing characteristics of the Christian system. Careless, inattentive persons, who take no pains to examine the subject, treat these sublime and heavenly truths as perfectly unintelligible, and the fiction of a disordered imagination. In vindication of themselves for rejecting the Gospel, they endeavour to cast an odium upon its advocates, and represent them, however sincere they may be, yet as men weak or insane, whose faculties have been injured by deep thinking on certain intricate points. But is the decision of such judges to be received? Or shall we be staggered by their insinuations? Then we must turn away with disgust from all, who are of Paul's complexion, and conclude, that, when men come to their right minds by submitting to the Saviour, and strenuously maintain his cause, they justly forfeit their reputation for understanding, and are no longer to be listened to. What a wretched infatuation

tuation is this! Let us not be deterred by ſuch invidious cenſures, but be willing to be "fools for Chriſt's ſake *," and welcome the reproach.

The Apoſtle replied to the charge with great energy, and yet with all proper deference: "I am not mad, moſt noble Feſtus, but ſpeak forth the words of truth and ſoberneſs." He then turned to Agrippa, and, by a maſterly and ſpirited addreſs, appealed to him, as being convinced of the facts, which he had aſſerted, and of their exact correſpondence with the ancient predictions. As if he perceived the inward feelings of his royal auditor, and would extort a confeſſion, he ſaid, "King Agrippa, believeſt thou the prophets? I know that thou believeſt." Indeed, Agrippa's mind appeared to be deeply impreſſed. He could not, like Feſtus, deride or condemn the preacher, but, rather, was diſpoſed to become his convert. He doubted not of his integrity, aſſented to the doctrines delivered, and ſeemed on the point of yielding an entire compliance with the Goſpel. He replied, "Almoſt thou perſuadeſt me to be a Chriſtian." Probably, he reſiſted the force of truth, through the fear of temporal inconveniences.

This acknowledgment, though favourable, did not ſatisfy St. Paul. He was aſſured, that ſuch partial convictions could never ſecure the ſalvation of the ſoul; and therefore he prayed, that neither the king nor any of the aſſembly might reſt in them. With tendereſt affection for all before him, he expreſſed his earneſt deſire, that they might thoroughly enter into

* 1 Cor. iv. 10.

his

his views, and resemble him, save in the chains, which he then wore: he wished them all the happiness, but none of the painful trials, which he felt. He exclaimed, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." This devout aspiration clearly manifested his unbounded benevolence, his full confidence of the goodness of his cause, and the blessedness which he experienced in the midst of sufferings. He was not ashamed of being "the prisoner of the Lord," he envied not the king and governor their pomp or power; he could not declare his best wishes for them in stronger terms, than by praying, that they might be brought to the same state of mind with himself.

The Apostle was dismissed: probably, his noble auditors could bear no more. It was agreed, however, among them, that he had not deserved any punishment, and might have been released, but that, in consequence of his own appeal, the cause must be referred to the decision of Cesar.

And now, upon a serious review of this history, we would enquire of our readers, not what is your opinion of St. Paul, (respecting which he himself would not have been solicitous) but what think you of your own character? What of the Saviour, whom he preached? Have you seriously attended to the doctrines, which he maintained? And what impression have they produced upon your minds? Perhaps, upon the first hearing, you have been disposed, like Festus, to treat them with contempt, as a visionary system, involving

only doubtful and ſuperſtitious queſtions. But, if you examine more minutely, and with more fixed and determinate regard, you will diſcover, at leaſt, that Chriſtianity is capable of being defended by ſolid and unanſwerable arguments, and that folly is juſtly chargeable upon thoſe, who affect to ſneer at what they cannot confute.

If you allow the truth and excellency of the Goſpel, we aſk again, Have you unfeignedly complied with its demands? Ah! how many reſemble Agrippa, and are inclined to reſiſt or trifle with their convictions! You grant, that to be a Chriſtian indeed, is a high and honourable diſtinction, and you profeſs a deſire of attaining it. But you are obſtructed by ſuch difficulties, and aſſaulted by ſuch temptations, that you have not courage, for the preſent at leaſt, to attempt the arduous work, as thinking it impoſſible to ſucceed. Or perhaps, you may be willing to yield only a partial ſubmiſſion, as far as may ſuit your convenience; and thus, with apparently good impreſſions and reſolutions, you may remain deſtitute of the power of religion. You are "almoſt perſuaded;" and here you reſt. Will this ſatisfy your conſciences? Or can you ſeriouſly expect, in ſuch a ſtate, to inherit the promiſes of God? O why will you not conſent to advance a little farther, and be "altogether," what you know you ought to be? There are thoſe, of a ſound underſtanding, and ſolid judgment, who can tell you of the bleſſedneſs, which they have found in the ſervice of Chriſt. They argue rightly, that it is not a vain illuſion of the fancy, but a delightful reality, by which

which they are ſupported and comforted in ſevereſt dangers and diſtreſſes. With tender compaſſion and affectionate importunity, they preſs you to make the trial, that you may partake of their happineſs. O credit their teſtimony, and reject not your own mercies! May He, who alone can ſubdue the human heart to himſelf, render the exhortation effectual, and perſuade you to embrace the Goſpel without reſerve! May the mighty influence of his grace enable you to break through all your difficulties, and make you not only almoſt, but altogether Chriſtians! Amen.

SAINT PAUL.

SECT. 6.

Paul, sent as a prisoner to Rome—experienced great difficulties in his voyage—shipwrecked on the island of Melita—wrought miracles there, and received kindness—proceeded to Rome—dwelt and preached in his own house under custody—released—travelled and laboured as before—was again imprisoned, and at last beheaded.

THE promises of God in due season will be fulfilled, though the events, to which they refer, may seem to us in the highest degree improbable. What we call difficulties, cannot possibly defeat or obstruct the divine counsel. A firm persuasion and practical application of this acknowledged truth will produce in our minds submission, composure, confidence, and joy, throughout our various changes and calamities. If, in dependence on the gracious declarations of God, we believe that we "shall not perish, but have eternal life;" we shall cheerfully expect the final consummation of our bliss, whatever enemies may assault us, or dangers beset our path. We shall say, like the great Apostle, whom we are now contemplating, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom *."

* 2 Tim. iv. 18.

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The history before us will shew, that this strong assurance of the divine faithfulness was not disappointed. Let us, then, take hold of the Covenant, which God hath established in Jesus Christ; so shall "all things work together for good," and with lively hope we may "cast all our care upon Him, for he careth for us *."

St. Paul had appealed to Cesar against the malicious accusations of the Jews. As a Roman citizen, he claimed the privilege of bringing his cause before the Emperor; for it seemed, that justice was denied him at the inferior tribunals. The preceding circumstances, which led to this demand, were so ordered, through the controlling influence of God, as to be the means of fulfilling the declaration, that the Apostle must bear witness to the Gospel at Rome. He was accordingly sent thither, as a prisoner, together with some others in similar circumstances, under the care of Julius a Centurion †. They went by sea, and the voyage proved extremely distressing and dangerous. Paul was accompanied by two Christian friends, Luke the beloved physician, and Aristarchus a Macedonian, who cheerfully partook of his sufferings, and, as his faithful associates, afforded him peculiar consolation ‡. He was, also, treated with much kindness by the Roman officer; and therefore at Sidon, where they called, he was permitted to visit his pious acquaintance, and procure refreshment. From this place they proceeded to Myra, and, having there changed their ship, they were afterwards so retarded by

* Rom. viii. 28. 1 Pet. v. 7. † Acts xxvii. 1, &c.
‡ Col. iv. 10, 11. Philem. 24.

contrary winds, that with great difficulty they reached the Fair Havens, a port in the iſland of Crete.

As the ſeaſon was far advanced, the Apoſtle adviſed the managers of the veſſel not to proſecute the voyage before winter, and ſolemnly warned them of the extreme danger attending it, which had, probably, been intimated to him by revelation. But, his precaution not being regarded, they again ſet ſail, and ſoon perceived their folly. They were overtaken by a violent ſtorm, and driven to the utmoſt diſtreſs, even ſo as to be in conſtant expectation of periſhing. For ſeveral days they ſaw neither ſun nor ſtars to guide them, and, of neceſſity, abandoned the ſhip to the winds and waves. They caſt overboard the articles of merchandiſe, with which they were laden, and, what ſeemed far more valuable in their circumſtances, their very tackling: they apprehended that they themſelves, alſo, ſhould be overwhelmed in the deep.

How, then, did it appear, that Paul was under the immediate care and protection of Heaven? Unbelief might have ſuggeſted, that the promiſe failed, and that God had forgotten to be gracious *. But that ſeaſon of extremity rendered the divine interpoſition, in favour of the Apoſtle, the more conſpicuous, and ſhewed to all the company the peculiar excellence and worth of this priſoner. He ſtood forth before them, and, while he blamed their contempt of his former advice, exhorted them to diſmiſs their fears, on the ground of the Lord's expreſs declaration to him in the preceding night. With

* Pſal. lxxvii. 8, 9.

firmneſs

firmneſs and courage, he avowed, in the preſence of idolaters, his relation and devotedneſs to the true God, affirming, " His I am, and Him I ſerve." He told them, how he had been aſſured by an Angel, that he muſt certainly be arraigned at Ceſar's tribunal, and that, though they muſt ſuffer ſhipwreck, the whole number of perſons with him, amounting to more than two hundred and ſeventy, ſhould be ſpared for his ſake. Thus, then, a peculiar honour was put upon the Lord's miniſter; and the careleſs navigators, ſurely, were conſtrained to attend to his voice. They could not but perceive, that he was ſupported and comforted by a God, whom they knew not, and whom the winds and ſeas obeyed. They ſaw him compoſed and cheerful, amidſt the roaring of the waves, while they themſelves were oppreſſed with terrible fear. Who would not wiſh to enjoy the ſame confidence of the divine favour?

Trials and dangers manifeſt the advantage of genuine piety. For this end the Lord afflicts his people, that they may prove the tenderneſs of his regard and the power of his grace. He is glorified in them, when, through a dependence on his word, they can ſubmit, truſt, and rejoice, amidſt ſtorms and tempeſts. This is what others know not and cannot attain. We aſk, Can you of a truth declare, as St. Paul, " His I am, and Him I ſerve?" Or, are you not aſhamed to avow your attachment to him, in the preſence of his enemies? If you do indeed confide in his mercy, his promiſe to you will be ſure: " He will never leave you, nor forſake you." Though you may ſeem

to be tossed upon a troubled ocean, nothing shall separate you from his love, or prevent the accomplishment of his purposes in your behalf. Like the Apostle, "believe God, that it shall be even as it is told you:" you need not desire any better security for your hopes. You should, also, feel compassion, and offer many prayers, for those around you, in the same town or family, who know not the Lord: perhaps, they will be spared for your sakes.

After thirteen days of perplexity and distress, the mariners suspected about midnight, that they were approaching to some land, and were alarmed by the fear of being dashed to pieces upon rocks. They formed the scheme, therefore, of escaping in the small boat; but Paul prevented them, by declaring to the Centurion, that their continuance in the ship was necessary to the safety of the whole. Though assured that no lives could be lost, yet he thought it absolutely requisite to hinder their flight: and, if we do not remember that the events, which God hath promised, are inseparably connected with the means, which he hath ordained, our faith will lead us to presumption. The boat was abandoned: and, while they were eagerly wishing for the light, he expressed his confidence that all should be preserved, and encouraged them to take food for their refreshment, as their strength was nearly exhausted. He looked up to God, in their presence, with devout adoration of his goodness, for the bread which yet remained: he himself did eat, and they were induced to follow his example.

The day came on, and they perceived that they were

were approaching to the ſhore. They endeavoured to direct the ſhip into a creek; but through the violence of a current they were driven upon the ſand, and by the force of the waves the veſſel was broken in pieces. All was confuſion. The ſoldiers, dreading the eſcape of the priſoners, propoſed to diſpatch them; but, for the Apoſtle's ſake, they were ſpared. Unwilling to conſent to his death, the Centurion interpoſed to prevent the ſcheme, and gave orders that all might be permitted to conſult their own ſafety; and thus, the whole company were preſerved by different means, and conveyed to land.

Do we not perceive the hand of God over-ruling theſe various circumſtances, for the protection of his faithful ſervant, and with a view to the propagation of the Goſpel? In like manner, He will render all events ſubſervient to the final deliverance of his people: but in the mean ſeaſon He proves their ſincerity, by making them paſs through much tribulation. We would encourage your expectation of a happy iſſue, if you be truly reconciled to him by Jeſus Chriſt. Many and formidable dangers may ſeem to obſtruct your path; but you ſhall ſurely reach the promiſed inheritance. In your own apprehenſion, you may eſcape with much difficulty, like the ſhipwrecked mariners before us, who were borne to the ſhore, "ſome on boards, and ſome on broken pieces of the ſhip:" yet the Lord, whom you truſt, will bring you to your deſired haven.

The ſcattered company were again collected on the iſland of Melita, where, in their diſtreſs, they met with remarkable

remarkable kindneſs from the inhabitants *. Some circumſtances, alſo, upon their landing, drew the general attention to St. Paul, and, perhaps, prepared the way for a favourable acceptance of the Goſpel in that place. Whilſt he was employed in aſſiſting to kindle a fire, a viper ſuddenly faſtened upon his hand.

He had been preſerved from the violence of a tempeſt, and the rage of the ſea: and now the venomous bite of a little animal was thought likely to be fatal. Ah! what is our life! To how many dangers are we expoſed! No ſooner are we delivered from one, than another ſucceeds; nor is there a moment, in which we are not liable to a freſh attack. Any trifling event, as well as that which appears moſt formidable, may prove deſtructive. But the ſerpent could not hurt the Apoſtle, whom the God of heaven was engaged to protect: he ſhook it into the fire, and felt no harm. The natives beheld and wondered. They expected his immediate death from this poiſonous creature, and conſidered him as a murderer, whom divine vengeance had marked for its object. But, when they ſaw that no bad effect followed, they were ready to adore him as a deity.

A miraculous influence was exerted by the Apoſtle, not for himſelf alone, but for the relief of others. Publius, a principal perſon, probably the governor of the iſland, entertained the ſhipwrecked company with ſingular hoſpitality; and he was well repaid for his kindneſs. His father being afflicted with a diſeaſe, which threatened his life, Paul prayed for him, and

* Acts xxviii. 1, &c.

instantly restored his health. Different cures being also wrought upon other inhabitants, they were disposed to revere this man of God, and to provide both him and his associates with every thing necessary for their voyage. During their stay, which was three months, he, doubtless, took the opportunity of recommending the Saviour to their notice and acceptance, and improved the time of his abode amongst them for the most valuable purposes. Such was his fervent zeal, that he could not refrain his lips from proclaiming the rich mercy of God in Jesus Christ. And perhaps, this shipwreck proved the happy means of healing the souls as well as the bodies of many of these courteous islanders, and of extending salvation to them who were ready to perish.

At length the company departed from the place, and, after touching at Syracuse and Rhegium, came to Puteoli, where, at the request of certain Christians, Paul and his friends obtained permission to remain a week. Afterwards he proceeded by land towards Rome. The account of his approach had reached that famous city; and in such estimation was he there held among them who had embraced the faith, that they went out to meet him, some to the distance of fifty, others of more than thirty miles, and conducted him on the road.

Their kind attendance in such circumstances afforded him peculiar pleasure: it excited gratitude to God, and inspired him with fresh life and vigour. Perhaps he began to droop: but, when he saw the dear brethren, to whom he had written his invaluable

luable Epiſtle a few years before, and over whom he had rejoiced as fellow-heirs of the kingdom, he was cheered and animated. "He thanked God, and took courage." Then he was willing, that Nero ſhould do his worſt: he ſhrunk not from danger or death, when he perceived ſome of the glorious effects of divine grace among the inhabitants of Rome; and he gave vent to the nobleſt affections, while he felt a warm attachment to theſe followers of his Lord, and the ſtrongeſt emotions of delight in their ſociety. We aſk, Is this the kind of happineſs, which you have experienced? Do you "love the brotherhood," or know any thing of "the communion of ſaints?" Would the very ſight of them revive your hearts, when oppreſſed with trouble? We pity you, as ſtrangers to the moſt exquiſite ſenſibility, if you have not taſted the ſweetneſs of Chriſtian friendſhip. But, if you enjoy that ineſtimable privilege, we exhort you to improve it for mutual edification and comfort. Value your opportunities of intercourſe with pious perſons, and, by your converſation and prayers, endeavour to inſpire each other with a holy fortitude, though you are travelling together, as Paul and his companions were, to meet a powerful and malignant enemy.

When they came to Rome, the priſoners were delivered to the proper officer; but the Apoſtle, being ſeparated from the reſt, was permitted, by peculiar favour, to dwell in an habitation of his own, under the cuſtody of a ſoldier, to whom, probably, he was chained. In this new ſituation, he ſhewed the ſame

zeal

zeal and courage for the defence and propagation of the Gospel, as before. . Three days after his arrival, he sent for the principal persons among the Jews, who resided there, and explained to them the true cause of his imprisonment. He assured them, that he was brought into those circumstances, not for any real offence committed, but only for maintaining "the hope of Israel," and publishing that salvation, which had been promised to this people, and was then procured for them by their long expected Messiah.

They had nothing to allege in reply, except the general prejudice, which has always been urged as an objection to the religion of Jesus, when its powerful influence appears; "This sect is every where spoken against." Many desired to hear his account of Christianity: a time was set; and for a whole day together he continued to expound and prove the doctrines of the Gospel from their own scriptures, and earnestly persuaded them to accept the Saviour. The effect was different upon different persons; some of them embracing the faith, but others rejecting it with contempt. While they contended among themselves, the Apostle dismissed them with that prophetic admonition, which was once delivered to their fathers, denouncing a judicial blindness and obduracy of heart, as a punishment for slighted mercy *. He then declared, that, having proposed to them the offer of salvation, he should turn to the Gentiles, and doubted not of a favourable reception.

* Isa. vi. 9, 10.

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In this ſtate of confinement St. Paul remained two years; his cauſe being neglected or deferred by the Emperor. But, even there, he obtained peculiar indulgence, and was eminently honoured as an inſtrument of extenſive good. Though a priſoner, he met with no interruption: his labours were more private and contracted than before, but they were ſtill unceaſing. All, who choſe, had free acceſs to him for inſtruction; and he continued, without fear or reſtraint, to exhibit the glorious character of the Redeemer, and inculcate a cordial ſubmiſſion to the government of his grace. Yet wiſe and earneſt as his exhortations were, we wonder not that they were deſpiſed by many, on account of the ignominious ſituation of the preacher. Whilſt he appeared as a criminal, chained by the hand to a common ſoldier, there muſt have been a ſtrong prejudice againſt him, and a conſiderable difficulty in believing, that he was ſo diſtinguiſhed a meſſenger of Heaven, appointed to declare the way of ſalvation. But ſome were diſpoſed by a divine influence to look beyond the meanneſs of his external circumſtances, and to receive his word with reverence and obedience, as the word of the living God. O how great is the mercy, to be delivered from all thoſe carnal regards and common objections, which unfit the mind for a fair examination of the truth!

We learn from ſeveral of St. Paul's Epiſtles, that his labours at Rome were attended with great ſucceſs. There had been indeed, for ſome years, a ſociety

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of Christians in that place, whose "faith was spoken of throughout the whole world *." But at this time they became more confirmed in their principles, and saw their numbers increase. The Lord God can make his cause and his people to prosper under the heaviest pressures, and in spite of the most violent opposition. We might have thought, while the Apostle was a prisoner for the Gospel's sake, that men would have been afraid or ashamed to profess any attachment to him or his doctrines. But the contrary effect appeared; and it wonderfully displayed the hand of God. "Many of the brethren, waxing confident by his bonds, were much more bold to speak the word without fear †." Fresh converts were added to the church. Onesimus, who, it should seem, had been a dishonest servant of Philemon, heard the preacher in his confinement, and, being brought to repentance, became "a faithful and beloved brother ‡." Then, also, the Gospel found admission, where we should have imagined it impossible to succeed, even in the court of Nero. That profane prince hated and persecuted this new religion: but some of his attendants or domestics were led to examine and embrace it, in consequence of the imprisonment of its most strenuous advocate, and proved an honour to their profession ||.

How mysterious are the ways of God! He accomplishes his purposes by such means, as we should never have devised. What situation could be more unfavourable to Christianity, than the palace of the Emperor?

* Rom. i. 8. † Phil. i. 14. ‡ Philem. 10. Col. iv. 9.
|| Phil. i. 13. iv. 22.

Emperor? But Jehovah "will work; and who shall let it *?" An Apostle is sent to Rome under criminal accusations, and pleads his cause before Cesar, in order that some of the houshold may hear and be converted. The dark dispensation was big with mercy. The events, which we should have lamented, as most deplorable, were designed to confirm and propagate the Gospel. Let us cheerfully leave the care of the Church in the Lord's hands. He reigneth: and He best knows what is most expedient for his own glory.

The various societies of Christians in different parts, and even to this very day, have reaped great advantage from the bonds of St. Paul. Had he not been a prisoner, he might not have written so large a portion of the sacred volume. Some of the rich fruits of his confinement, we perceive in those excellent Epistles, which are addressed to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews: and we praise God, that the leisure, afforded him at Rome, was employed for our profit. It appears from those animated and inspired compositions, that he rejoiced in his sufferings, and was so far carried above the fear of death, as to exult in the prospect †. It has been thought, that he then felt, more than ever, the blessedness of his own principles, and enjoyed a peculiar elevation of soul. O let us not shrink from afflictions! They may be designed to confirm and increase our experience of the power and comforts of true religion.

* Isa xliii. 13. † Col. i. 24. Phil. i. 20—24.

The diſtreſſes of the Apoſtle gave occaſion to ſome kind and liberal exertions among his friends. He received ſeaſonable ſupplies for his ſupport from the Chriſtians at Philippi, by that honoured meſſenger Epaphroditus, "who miniſtered to his wants *." Oneſiphorus, alſo, is commended, for having "often refreſhed him, and not being aſhamed of his chain †." But he met with trials more painful than the fury of his avowed enemies, from the perfidy of falſe profeſſors, and the unſteadineſs of certain ſincere believers. "All they," ſays he, "which are in Aſia, are turned away from me ‡." Many of his former friends were ſo influenced by ſelfiſh regards or miſconceptions of his conduct, as to ſhew a ſtrange diſaffection. Nay, he declares, that when he was brought before Nero, "at his firſt anſwer, no man ſtood with him; but all men forſook him §." Such a general deſertion was beyond meaſure afflictive. We are ready to aſk, Where were the Chriſtians, whom he celebrated in his Epiſtle? Where the brethren, who travelled fifty miles to meet him? Or why this change of diſpoſition? How forcibly does this teach us, that "it is better to truſt in the Lord, than to put confidence in man ‖!" Yet let us beware of drawing raſh concluſions, or condemning all thoſe as hypocrites, who may betray an occaſional weakneſs and timidity. Such weakneſs and timidity have appeared in the beſt and moſt eminent men; as we might inſtance in our great reformer Arch-

* Phil. ii. 25. iv. 18. † 2 Tim. i. 16. ‡ 15. § iv. 16. ‖ Pſal. cxviii. 8.

biſhop Cranmer, and in the Apoſtle Peter. Perhaps the very perſons, who behaved in this diſgraceful manner at Rome, were afterwards recovered, and enabled to give deciſive proofs of integrity, fortitude, and zeal.

A. D. 65. At the end of two years, St. Paul, being arraigned before the Emperor, was honourably acquitted, and reſtored to his liberty. That cruel and haughty tyrant ſeemed unlikely to favour the priſoner: but Nero's fury was reſtrained, becauſe it was deſigned, that the life of this faithful ambaſſador for Chriſt ſhould be ſpared a little longer for the benefit of the Church. Hear his own account: "The Lord ſtood with me, and ſtrengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion *." O be encouraged to perſevere with holy fervour and intrepidity, if you ſerve the Lord Chriſt! Your divine maſter will ſurely protect you againſt all the machinations of your opponents, and ſupport you in your place, till the work aſſigned you be completed.

After his releaſe, the Apoſtle travelled as before, and continued with his uſual aſſiduity to propagate the Goſpel. During that time, which was two or three years, he made a journey to Spain, and, as ſome have thought, to France, and, poſſibly, to this Iſland †. Perhaps, he took another circuit among the Aſiatic churches, eſtabliſhed Chriſtian ſocieties in Crete, which he committed to the care of Titus, and again viſited

* 2 Tim. iv. 17. † Rom. xv. 24.

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the Philippians, as he had intimated, "for their furtherance and joy of faith *." This, at leaſt, is evident, that he was not aſhamed or weary of the ſervice, in which he had embarked, and that he ceaſed not from his labours of love; till he put off his earthly tabernacle. He returned to Rome, with the view, probably, of confirming his former teſtimony in that city, and, on ſome pretence or other, was once more caſt into priſon. St. Chryſoſtom relates, that, a concubine of Nero being converted by means of the Apoſtle, the tyrant was exaſperated, commanded him to be taken into cuſtody, and ſoon afterwards put him to death.

In that laſt confinement he wrote his ſecond Epiſtle to Timothy, under the expectation of ſuffering; and for that reaſon it contains his moſt deliberate ſentiments and moſt ſolemn views of eternity. It appears, that he did not repent of his exertions in the ſervice of his Lord, did not fluctuate in his opinions, or ſtagger in his hopes. The ſtrain in which he writes, the language of victory over death and hell, abundantly manifeſts, that he ſtill wiſhed to encourage others in the faith, and exulted in his own proſpects of heaven. How animated are his expreſſions! "I am not aſhamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am perſuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him againſt that day †." "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight,

* Phil. i. 25. ii. 24. Titus i. 5. Philem. 22. Heb. xiii. 23.
† 2 Tim. i. 12.

I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, ſhall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them alſo that love his appearing *." The knowledge and the love of Chriſt will enable us likewiſe to ſpeak the ſame language, and inſpire us with confidence and joy, though we ſhould ſee death approaching in the moſt tremendous forms. Ah! how few have felt the full influence of the Goſpel, or attained its exalted privileges! This may teach us to account for our ſloth and cowardice. While we are ſtrangers to the grace of Jeſus, it is no wonder that we decline every arduous ſervice, and tremble at the intimations of our diſſolution.

A. D. 67. St. Paul cloſed his life in the moſt honourable manner, and ſealed with his blood the doctrines, which he had long ſo zealouſly maintained. He ſuffered about the ſame time as St. Peter, but not by crucifixion: being a Roman citizen he was beheaded. It is ſurpriſing, not that he was cut off by the hand of violence at laſt, but that ſo firm an advocate for the Goſpel ſhould be ſpared ſo long, in the midſt of powerful and malignant oppoſers. How eminent does his character appear! How valuable his labours! How glorious his death! Do we not conſider his crown of martyrdom, as an enviable diſtinction? Let us fight the good fight of faith; and we alſo ſhall conquer, as he did, when taking leave of the world.

He was exalted above others by his wiſdom, zeal,

* 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

and

and ſucceſs; by gifts, viſions, and revelations of the Lord. "He was caught up into paradiſe, and heard unſpeakable words *." He "was not a whit behind the very chiefeſt Apoſtles †:" nay, he "laboured more abundantly than they all ‡," and, probably, poſſeſſed peculiar powers and authority in his high function ‖. But, notwithſtanding his honourable privileges, his ſufferings were extreme: and even in theſe he ſeemed more eſpecially to exult. Let us hear his own account: "We are troubled on every ſide,—perplexed,—perſecuted,—caſt down,—always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jeſus §:" "in all things approving ourſelves as the miniſters of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in neceſſities, in diſtreſſes, in ſtripes, in impriſonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in faſtings ⊥." "Of the Jews five times received I forty ſtripes ſave one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I ſtoned, thrice I ſuffered ſhipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderneſs, in perils in the ſea, in perils among falſe brethren; in wearineſs and painfulneſs, in watchings often, in hunger and thirſt, in faſtings often, in cold and nakedneſs. Beſides thoſe things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches **."

* 2 Cor. xii. 4. † xi. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10. ‖ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. 2 Cor. x. 8. xiii. 10. § 2 Cor. iv. 8—10. ⊥ vi. 4, 5. ** xi. 24—28.

He had one particular trial, of which a clear account is not given us. He calls "it a thorn in the flesh *;" which implies that it was something as painful to his mind, as a sharp or pointed instrument, continually piercing him, would be to his body. Some suppose it to have been a deformed appearance, or difficulty of elocution; to his enemies a handle for reproach, and to himself the occasion of distress, as it rendered his preaching less acceptable. The objection was urged; "His bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible †." This seemed likely to obstruct his usefulness, and might excite in him the keenest anguish. But, whatever the affliction was, his spiritual adversary took the advantage, and made it the ground of a severe temptation: it was "the messenger of Satan to buffet him." Yet God permitted it for his good, and designed it to prevent or counteract any bad effect, which his eminence in the Church might produce upon his mind: it was given to him, "lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations." In this, however, as in other trials, he sought relief from heaven. He prayed with peculiar importunity, and obtained that remarkable assurance from the Saviour, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Upon this, his fears were dispersed; and, perceiving a peculiar suitableness and mercy in the appointment, he declared, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The example is highly instruc-

* 2 Cor. xii. 7—10. † x. 10.

tive: it ſhews us the nature, neceſſity, and ſalutary tendency of thoſe calamities and temptations, by which advanced believers are frequently oppreſſed; and it likewiſe teaches us, with what temper of mind we ſhould ſuffer, and what ſtrong ſupport and conſolation we may expect, if we confide in the Redeemer.

After all, the moſt diſtinguiſhing lineaments in the Apoſtle's character were an unſhaken and affectionate attachment to his Lord, an extenſive and generous benevolence to men, and an ardent deſire to ſave their ſouls, whatever dangers he himſelf might ſuſtain. The warmeſt profeſſions ſeemed too weak to expreſs the fervour of his heart. What words are thoſe! "The love of Chriſt conſtraineth us *." "I will very gladly ſpend and be ſpent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the leſs I be loved †." "Yea, and if I be offered upon the ſacrifice and ſervice of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all ‡."

We are aware, that even a diſtant reſemblance and imitation of the pattern here exhibited would now be laughed at, as the ſure mark of madneſs and enthuſiaſm. But the fear of ſuch reproach ought not to deter us: it will be an honourable badge, in which we may glory. Few, alas! are in danger of coming under that cenſure. Are not we very remote from that peculiar excellency of temper and conduct, for which the Apoſtle has been ſo juſtly celebrated? And will it avail us any thing, to admire this bright example, or that of any other ſaint, if we perſiſt in

* 2 Cor. v. 14. † xii. 15. ‡ Phil. ii. 17.

those practices, which are totally dissimilar and opposite? No: we shall thereby betray, more evidently, our own baseness, and render more sure our final condemnation. But, if with sincerity of heart we desire and endeavour to follow St. Paul, as he followed Christ, we may triumph in the hope of being where he is, and of joining the glorious company of those, who are redeemed to God from the earth, and who shall surround his throne for ever.

CORNELIUS:

CHAP. X.

Cornelius, a Roman Centurion—his devotion and liberality—was encouraged by an Angel, and directed to send for St. Peter—received the Apostle and desired his instructions—was endued with the Holy Ghost and baptized—requested Peter's continuance—probably retained his situation in the army.

THE calling of the Gentiles and their admission into the Christian Church is an event of great importance in ecclesiastical history; and a distinct account is given us of the way, in which that gracious dispensation was introduced. The Apostles had been charged to teach all nations, and to receive by baptism those, who should profess the faith *; but so partial were their views, so bigotted their minds in favour of their own countrymen, that a particular revelation seemed necessary to explain to them the extent of their commission, and dispose them to accept the Gentiles as fellow heirs. At length, the divine will being manifested in such a manner as to exclude all doubt, the partition wall was broken down: those, who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," were

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

taken

taken into the Church of Chriſt, and admitted to its full privileges.

Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, was ſelected from the Pagan world, as the firſt inſtance of this diſtinguiſhed mercy, and, by the expreſs appointment of Heaven, enrolled among the number of the faithful *. It is in vain for us to demand the reaſon, why he obtained this honourable preference, ſince God diſtributes his favours as He pleaſes; but ſuch was his amiable character before his extraordinary call, that he ſeemed leſs likely than many others to excite the prejudices of the Jews. He was a man of integrity and ſerioufneſs, under the guidance and renewing influence of the Holy Ghoſt: his views, indeed, were imperfect and dark, but he walked uprightly, according to the light, which faintly glimmered on his path. He had been led, perhaps in a gradual manner, to ſeek reconciliation with God; and therefore, though ignorant of the particular diſpenſation revealed in the Goſpel, he poſſeſſed a previous preparation of mind for its reception. With his convictions and impreſſions, he could not but be ready to accept the ſalvation of Chriſt, when fairly propoſed.

In all caſes converſion is effected by the agency of God, "from whom all holy deſires, all good counſels, and all juſt works do proceed †." The very firſt tendency to real, ſpiritual religion, its beginning, as well as its continuance, progreſs, and perfection in the ſoul, muſt be aſcribed to Him; "for it is God, which worketh in you both to will and to do, of his

* Acts x. 1, &c. † Second Collect at Evening prayer.

good

good pleaſure *." But the methods of his grace are different with different perſons. With ſome a ſudden change is produced; their darkneſs is almoſt inſtantly diſperſed; hope and comfort break in upon them; and they ſoon attain a clear and deciſive evidence of their acceptance. But others diſcover a gradual alteration, and, though ſeriouſly diſpoſed and truly devoted to God, remain in much ignorance and perplexity. It may be difficult, for ſome time, to pronounce concerning their ſtate: yet of this we are aſſured, that the ſeed of God, implanted in the ſoul, is incorruptible, and will ſpring up to everlaſting life †. Whatever delays or obſtructions there may be, the final iſſue will be ſafe and glorious.

Cornelius, as being uncircumciſed and a "ſtranger from the covenants of promiſe," was deemed unclean by the Jews; yet, as we have ſuggeſted, he had been brought under good impreſſions, and delivered from the fooliſh and wicked practices of idolatry. Though a Roman ſoldier, he did not worſhip the gods of his country; but, in conſequence, probably, of his reſidence in Judea, he had become acquainted with the ſcriptures of the old teſtament, and was led to revere the God of Iſrael. Even now, he is ſaid to have been "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his houſe." Being ſincerely deſirous to know and do the will of God, he was ſtrictly attentive to the duties of religion, as far as his information carried him; and, feeling a ſerious concern for the ſouls of his domeſtics, he engaged them in the ſame holy ex-

* Phil. ii. 13. † 1 Pet. i. 23. 1 John iii. 9.

ercifes

ercifes with himfelf. He difcovered, alfo, a liberal difpofition in relieving the diftreffes of the poor, as well as a peculiar fervour of mind towards God by the conftancy of his prayers. His benevolence and piety were beautifully connected; and they added a luftre to each other. How excellent and lovely the character!

If we truly underftand the Chriftian faith, we have received clearer light, and are laid under ftronger obligations; but do we furpafs or even imitate the pattern here exhibited? Are we impreffed with an awful fenfe of the majefty of God, and an earneft defire to pleafe him? Do we enforce the principles of religion in our refpective habitations, and endeavour to communicate the knowledge, which we have attained, to thofe who are immediately fubject to our influence? Do we direct and accompany them to the throne of grace? Ah! how many families never affociate together to own their dependence upon God, in their domeftic capacity! And is not the neglect difgraceful to the profeffion of the Gofpel?

A ferious attention fhould be paid to different duties; fo that all may have their proper place and proportionable regard. While you fhew a generous folicitude for the fouls of others, convince them that you are ready to relieve their bodily neceffities. True piety cannot confift with covetoufnefs. If there be any pretenders to devotion, who "fhut up their bowels of compaffion," they will be condemned by the example of Cornelius, even before he knew the Gofpel. Yet, on the other hand, the moft liberal con-

tributions to the poor will not compenſate the want of godlineſs. We aſk, then, if you "give much alms to the people," what are you offering to God? Are not his claims denied or withheld? Do you "pray alway," or ſeize upon every opportunity to "pour out your heart before him?" You plead, perhaps, your numerous engagements, the peculiar ſnares and difficulties of your ſituation, as if they rendered the performance of religious duties impoſſible. But we refer you to the caſe of Cornelius, who, though a ſoldier, in the midſt of occupations and connections extremely unfavourable to every thing of a ſerious tendency, yet maintained a courſe of ſolid and exemplary piety. Your neglect ariſes, not ſo much from want of opportunity, as a ſecret averſion to the ſervice of God; and therefore you are inexcuſable.

An improper uſe of the excellent character before us, has been made by ſome, who deny the neceſſity of Revelation under the abſurd idea that what they call natural religion is ſufficient. It is argued, that men by the light of reaſon and their own moral powers may attain to ſuch a ſtate, as to want no further information or aſſiſtance. But this is a concluſion, which the preſent hiſtory does not warrant. Cornelius, probably, as we have intimated, was inſtructed in the principles of the Jews, and indebted to the ſacred writings for all his knowledge of the true God. It is allowed, that he was upright, and his goodneſs conſpicuous. But the whole account ſhews, that his righteouſneſs was defective: he was taught to ſeek remiſſion of his ſins through the diſpenſation of the Goſ-

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pel, and aſcribe his acceptance with God to Chriſt alone. This caſe, ſurely, ought not to be appealed to by thoſe, who would ſet aſide the mediation of the Son of God.

Through the influence of divine grace, Cornelius had been excited to ſeek the Lord with unfeigned ſincerity and devotedneſs of heart: and perſons of ſuch a character ſhall not be left to periſh, or to "grope in the dark without light." He, whom they ſerve, will look upon them with gracious regard, compaſſionate their ignorance, and raiſe up ſome inſtrument or other for their further inſtruction and advancement. The deſires, which He hath implanted, are pleaſing to him; and, though they meet with impediments, they ſhall not be diſappointed.

On a certain day, while the pious Centurion was waiting before God with peculiar ſolemnity, in faſting and prayer, an Angel appeared to aſſure him of the favourable notice of Heaven. Cornelius began to tremble, upon ſeeing the bright form ſtand before him, and hearing himſelf ſummoned by name. The celeſtial meſſenger, however, encouraged him by an explicit declaration, that his acts both of devotion and benevolence were recorded in the divine remembrance, and conſidered as a decided mark of his ſincerity.

This circumſtance has been thought to countenance the doctrine of human merit. We allow, that it furniſhes a powerful inducement to abound in works of piety and mercy, and we would inculcate the performance of them by every ſcriptural argument.

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If they are done from truly ſpiritual motives, they ſhall not be forgotten before God. But they will not entitle us to the glories of heaven, or procure the remiſſion of our ſins. It ſeems an egregious abſurdity, to appeal to the new teſtament in ſupport of ſuch a ſcheme, as would render the whole ſyſtem of the Goſpel needleſs and inconſiſtent. According to that ſuppoſition, Cornelius was completely juſtified by his own obedience; and faith in the Son of God was, to him at leaſt, perfectly unneceſſary. Yet it appears from the hiſtory, that he was directed by the Angel to ſend for the Apoſtle Peter, for the expreſs purpoſe of being inſtructed in thoſe principles, " whereby he and all his houſe ſhould be ſaved *." This account, ſurely, does not favour the preſumptuous notion of claiming the divine regard as a matter of debt; for it repreſents the redemption of Chriſt as indiſpenſably requiſite for perſons of the moſt amiable character.

The Angel himſelf did not explain or declare the nature of ſalvation. That honour was reſerved for one of our fallen race. The Lord has not " committed the word of reconciliation" to thoſe holy ſpirits, who, as they are not ſubject to our temptations and infirmities, could not addreſs us, perhaps, with proper feeling and compaſſion. But it is intruſted to them, who ſtand as much in need of pardoning and ſanctifying grace as any of their hearers, and are therefore better qualified to enter into their caſes with tenderneſs, and accommodate themſelves

* Acts xi. 14.

to their diftreffes. Thofe, however, who would preach Chrift with good effect, fhould be truly acquainted with him, and be able to teftify his power and mercy from their own experience. Otherwife, they will, probably, deliver the declarations of the Gofpel with as much indifference, as if thefe were not to be depended on, or were of no importance. But, being enriched with all fpiritual bleffings in Chrift Jefus, they will, with a peculiar fervour, commend him, who is the object of their warmeft affections, to the notice and acceptance of others. The facred miniftry is of divine inftitution, and is defigned to accomplifh, even by weak inftruments, the moft glorious purpofes. It pleafes God by this his appointed ordinance to awaken the carelefs, to inftruct the ignorant, to fubdue the rebellious to obedience, to produce and increafe in his people repentance, faith, hope, love, and joy, through the influence of his Spirit. Let us learn to venerate the function, which He hath fo highly honoured, and expect from it the moft folid advantages, while we read, that an Angel referred the Centurion to St. Peter, to be taught the way of falvation.

Cornelius inftantly complied with the heavenly mandate. Having called fome of his pious attendants, (for fuch he had engaged in his fervice) he related the extraordinary vifion, and fent them to invite the Apoftle to his houfe. So prejudiced was Peter againft the uncircumcifed Gentiles, that he would have revolted at the propofal, had not the Lord prepared his mind, and overcome his objections in fuch a manner,

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as to furnish a sufficient vindication of his conduct even before others. He saw in a trance a miraculous and emblematical representation, by which he learnt, that the ceremonial distinctions of clean and unclean were designed to be abolished, and that he ought not to retain any exceptions against those, whom God was pleased to receive and sanctify. This occurred just before the messengers arrived; and he was then directed by an immediate impulse of the Spirit, to accompany them without hesitation.

In the mean time, such was the meek and teachable disposition of the Centurion, and such his earnest desire to know the way of God more perfectly, that he waited with much anxiety for the coming of his illustrious teacher. He had also collected his relatives and intimate acquaintance, (with whom, it should seem, he improved his influence for the best purposes) that they might share the blessing of Peter's instructions. This circumstance reminds us of what we owe to our near connections in life. We profess affection, and a readiness to serve them: but how should our friendship appear? Should we not be most solicitous to promote their spiritual and everlasting welfare? For that end, we should endeavour to bring them under the ministry of the Gospel, if we know its value, and expect any advantage from it for ourselves. But, while we feel no such concern, and say as Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" we prove that we are destitute of true benevolence, and ignorant of the unspeakable worth of salvation.

Upon the Apostle's entering the house, Cornelius

met him, and by the lowest prostration testified his reverence for the person, who came with an express commission to declare the counsel of God. Peter, however, refused the homage, as unsuitable to a mere human being, and then enquired for what purposes they had requested his attendance. The Centurion, in reply, related with great simplicity the directions he had received from heaven, adding, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

How solemn the occasion! And how amiable the disposition of the pious soldier! He considered himself in the presence of God, and felt an earnest desire to know and do his will, while he stood as an humble scholar to listen to the instructions of the inspired preacher. How much more promising would appearances be among ourselves, if all our congregations, assembled for public worship, possessed the same temper, when the ministers of Christ stand forth to declare the truth! Is it not allowed to be our bounden duty, to yield an unfeigned regard and unreserved subjection to the revealed word of God, however opposite it may be to our former notions? But with what contemptuous indifference do many sit in our churches! With what pride and petulance do some cavil at every doctrine, which suits not their preconceived systems! With what a rebellious obstinacy do others reject those holy precepts, which require their carnal affections to be subdued! Few, therefore, are truly solicitous, like Cornelius, to learn and obey the whole will of God.

St. Peter addreſſed his attentive audience with ſolemnity and earneſtneſs. He obſerved, the preſent occaſion had convinced him, that the bleſſings of the Goſpel were not deſigned to be limited to any people; that according to this gracious diſpenſation, as none could obtain favour for any external diſtinctions or advantages, ſo none would be excluded from mercy for the want of them; and that, without exception of rank or nation, the Lord receives all thoſe, who poſſeſs a reverential regard to his majeſty, and render unfeigned ſubmiſſion to all his righteous commands. But, leſt their imperfect obedience ſhould be conſidered as the ground of their acceptance, he ſtated, in a clear and decided manner, the appointed method of juſtification through the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. The character of the Saviour, his perſon, work, and offices, his life, death, and reſurrection, his coming to judgment, and the atteſtation of all the prophetic writings to the free forgiveneſs of ſins through faith in his name;—theſe were the grand topics, on which the Apoſtle inſiſted. Theſe, alſo, are the ſubjects, which, above all others, are neceſſary to be underſtood and kept in our view; and to an honeſt declaration of them, in every age of the Church, the divine bleſſing is promiſed.

Cornelius and his company liſtened with fixed attention; and, while they gladly received the record, which God gave of his Son, the Holy Ghoſt deſcended, probably with ſome external manifeſtations of his power, confirmed the truth of the word, and accompanied it with an efficacious influence to the hearers.

They were endued with ſuch miraculous powers, as might qualify them to be witneſſes and preachers of the Goſpel. They ſpake in languages, which they had never learned, and with ardent gratitude proclaimed the ſovereign and diſtinguiſhing mercy of the Lord. When He had thus evidently accepted them, his people could not refuſe to admit them into their communion. They were all, therefore, taken into the ſociety of believers, by the initiating rite of baptiſm: they made an open profeſſion of attachment to Chriſt, and ſolemnly dedicated themſelves to his ſervice. Nothing more is related concerning them, but that they requeſted the continuance of Peter a few days longer, being deſirous to enjoy ſome further benefit from his miniſtry, to be eſtabliſhed, edified, and comforted in their holy faith. Thoſe, who know the worth of the Goſpel, will eſteem and ſolicit the company and converſation of ſuch, as are more advanced in grace, and are able to communicate the moſt ſalutary inſtructions. But, when connections of this ſort are diſregarded, it is obvious, that the truth and ways of God are not properly eſteemed.

Probably, the Centurion retained his ſituation in the Roman army: at leaſt, he was not commanded to relinquiſh it; nor is the occupation of a ſoldier any where condemned in the ſcriptures, as abſolutely ſinful in itſelf. It was, indeed, unfavourable to pure religion, yet perhaps it furniſhed him with opportunities of doing extenſive good. The Apoſtolical direction is, "Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God*."

* 1 Cor. vii. 24.

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It is poſſible, that a good conſcience may require us to abandon our poſt: but let us not quit it, merely to avoid difficulties. Rather, let us enquire, if, by a faithful and honourable diſcharge of our duty, we may not glorify God and benefit our fellow-creatures. We may expect peculiar ſupport in the place, to which we are appointed; and, perhaps, we are not qualified for any other.

Whatever we may be diſpoſed to think of the ſtate of Cornelius towards God, before his extraordinary call, it is evident that the ſcriptures deſcribe this call as a diſpenſation of peculiar mercy, from which both he and others received ſingular advantages. If he had previouſly obtained acceptance, he was then taught that he owed it entirely to the interpoſition of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt: and, doubtleſs, the clear diſcovery of redemption tended to fill his ſoul with peace and joy, and to excite him to higher degrees of holineſs. Nothing, therefore, can be concluded from the caſe before us to the diſparagement of the Goſpel: nay, rather, we may here perceive the bleſſed fruits of the Saviour's mediation, and in this view ſhould ſay with the Apoſtles, "Then hath God alſo to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life *," and "purified their hearts by faith †." May we be encouraged to ſeek for a participation of the ſame grace!

A public teſtimony was now given, that in the Church of Chriſt the diſtinctions between Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, are done away, and that believers "are all one in Chriſt Jeſus."

* Acts xi. 18. † xv. 9.

ſus *." And "if we be Chriſt's," it matters not from what parentage we are deſcended, "we are Abraham's ſeed, and heirs according to the promiſe." The door of mercy continues open, and we are authorized to exhort all, without reſpect of perſons, that they earneſtly ſolicit an admiſſion. The ſame bleſſing, which Peter propoſed to Cornelius, is ſtill offered to us: it is our's, alſo, to hear of remiſſion of ſins through faith in the Son of God. It is generally allowed, that notorious offenders ſtand in need of it; nor ſhould we heſitate to tender it in the fulleſt manner to the moſt abandoned. But ſome appear to reject it with diſdain, as if, on account of their amiable temper and moral character, it were unneceſſary for them to ſeek redemption through the blood of the croſs. Alas! they deceive themſelves. If they be as exemplary as Cornelius, which perhaps may be doubted, yet this caſe will teach them to place a high value upon the ſalvation, exhibited in the Goſpel, and will condemn their proud contempt of this mercy.

To men of all characters the good tidings are addreſſed. The Lord Chriſt is preached unto us for the forgiveneſs of ſins. Is not this the bleſſing, which is indiſpenſably requiſite? Then let us obey the great evangelical precept, without cavilling, and believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as having made peace for us. So will the word of God come unto us, as it did to Cornelius, "in demonſtration of the Spirit and of power." The Holy Ghoſt is not now communicated in thoſe extraordinary operations, which were

* Gal. iii. 28, 29.

once

once expedient; but he descends, as certainly as he did in the primitive ages, on all who cordially accept the message of grace. He enlightens, sanctifies, and comforts them, and thus gives them an unquestionable evidence, that they have not "believed a lie." Let us look up in fervent prayer for this efficacious influence, that he may accomplish in us "all the good pleasure of his goodness." Then, like the devout Centurion, we shall shout aloud for joy, whilst we magnify God for his mercy, and celebrate the praises of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

HEROD AGRIPPA.

CHAP. XI.

Herod perſecuted the Church—killed James—impriſoned Peter—was diſappointed by that Apoſtle's miraculous eſcape—flattered, as if he were a deity—ſuddenly deſtroyed for his pride.

The faithful followers of Chriſt, though called to maintain a ſevere warfare againſt an evil world, are not every moment engaged in actual conflict. For gracious purpoſes they may be at certain times exempted from all external diſturbances, and permitted to enjoy a ſtate of eaſe and proſperity. "The Lord maketh even their enemies to be at peace with them *." Such a ſeaſon occurred after the converſion of St. Paul. Perhaps ſome of the violent oppoſers of the Goſpel were diſcouraged, when they ſaw ſo bold a champion deſert them. "Then had the churches reſt throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt, were multiplied †." At length, however, a furious perſecutor aroſe, and threatened them with terrible devaſtation. The reſult, indeed, was, that he was ſuddenly cut down by the

* Prov. xvi. 7. † Acts ix. 31.

hand of God, whom he had provoked, yet for a while he was suffered to shew the malignity of his heart, for the vindication of the stroke of the Avenger.

The contemplation of such characters may excite many painful sensations, but suggests profitable reflections. We shall here perceive, that our depraved nature is filled with enmity against God and his people, that the fiercest adversaries of the truth are not to be dreaded or envied, in the height of all their pomp and power, and that their triumphing is short. We shall learn, also, from the instance before us, to fear before that holy Lord God, who is jealous of his honour, and whose anger is tremendous, when he ariseth to take vengeance.

The person, now introduced to our notice, is Herod surnamed Agrippa, grandson of that Herod, who massacred the children at Bethlehem, nephew to him who murdered John the Baptist, and the father of that prince who was "almost persuaded to be a Christian." He was the king of Judea, which he governed as a Roman province. He is said to have been zealous for the religion of the Jews: but, perhaps, he professed it only with the view of conciliating their favour; at least, he shewed in his general conduct a fondness for popularity. His avowed opposition to the Gospel may in some degree be ascribed to that principle, whilst it is obvious from the haughtiness of spirit, which he possessed, that he must himself have been totally averse to the humbling doctrines of our religion.

"Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain

certain of the Church *." We lament, that power ſhould ever be exerciſed for ſuch purpoſes; and that they, who are appointed "for the puniſhment of evil doers," ſhould exert their authority to haraſs and deſtroy them that do well. The flock of Chriſt was the object of this tyrant's indignation: he regarded not their inoffenſive and benevolent diſpoſition, but like a ravenous wolf ſought to ſcatter and devour them; and they, like defenceleſs ſheep, were obliged to fly, or were doomed to the ſlaughter. They were afflicted in different ways, not by reproach and contempt alone, or by the deprivation of their worldly ſubſtance, but by impriſonment, tortures, and death. It ſhould ſeem, that their religion was their only offence, and the true cauſe of that malignity, with which they were treated. Chriſtians may be guilty of imprudence and miſconduct: but it is their attachment to their divine Maſter, which principally excites perſecution againſt them. Thus Jeſus declared; "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but becauſe ye are not of the world, but I have choſen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you †."

Probably, many perſons in a private ſituation fell under Herod's reſentment; but, theſe were not of conſequence enough to ſatiate his fury. He turned his hand againſt ſome of the leading characters in the Church, and, of courſe, the Apoſtles were firſt marked out for deſtruction. James, the brother of John, was ſeized and ſlain with the ſword: thus he, who had been ſo dear to Jeſus, ſoon finiſhed his labours,

* Acts xii. 1, &c. † John xv. 19.

and,

and, the firſt of the twelve, received the crown of martyrdom. The loſs of ſo valuable a life, when Chriſtianity ſtood in need of every ſupport, was an afflicting diſpenſation. But, perhaps, the violence and cruelty of the oppreſſor, inſtead of checking, promoted the progreſs of the Goſpel. Did it not appear more glorious, through St. James's readineſs to ſuffer in its defence, and through the ſubſequent perſeverance of his aſſociates in the miniſtry, who continued to deſpiſe the menaces of their enraged perſecutors? The Jews, however, felt themſelves gratified by the king's ſanguinary conduct, and, probably, flattered him for the fervour of his religious zeal. With a view, therefore, to recommend himſelf and his adminiſtration, he proceeded to further acts of ſeverity againſt the Chriſtians. Alas! to what lengths of folly and wickedneſs have men been hurried by a fondneſs for vain applauſe! Let us beware of indulging a paſſion, which is of ſo deſtructive a tendency.

The aſſiduous and unwearied exertions of St. Peter in propagating the truth rendered him particularly obnoxious. Accordingly, the tyrant marked him out for the next victim, apprehended and impriſoned him. It was intended that his death ſhould be a public exhibition, as a ſight which would afford peculiar pleaſure to the people. But the celebration of the paſſover interfered with the execution. Theſe murderers were exact in their ceremonial obſervances, like the murderers of Jeſus, who, while they contrived his crucifixion, paid a ſcrupulous attention to the holy feaſt. It was decreed, therefore, that the

Apoſtle

Apoſtle ſhould be brought forth to ſuffer, at the concluſion of the ſolemnity.' But his hour was not then come. Whatever our enemies may threaten, we poſſeſs an infallible ſecurity under the care and protection of our Almighty Lord, ſo long as he ſhall pleaſe to employ us in his ſervice, or retain us in our appointed poſt. Let us leave to him the determination of every event, and be ſolicitous, not ſo much to eſcape the hand of violence, as to anſwer ſome uſeful purpoſe, "whether it be by life or by death."

Herod, determined to make ſure of his priſoner, not only kept him in cloſe confinement, but committed him to the cuſtody of four quaternions of ſoldiers, leſt a reſcue or an eſcape ſhould be attempted. But no ſtrength or contrivance can prevail againſt the counſel of the Lord. If He ſhould ſay, "Go forth," no gates or chains, nor even all the armed force of the moſt potent monarch, can hold one weak, defenceleſs ſaint in bondage. The inceſſant prayers of the Church, which were offered up for the Apoſtle, procured the divine interpoſition for his releaſe, and effectually defeated the king's intention. "The Lord ſent his Angel, and delivered Peter out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the Jews." Yet his miraculous preſervation was delayed till within a few hours of the time appointed for his execution. On this account it was the more conſpicuous, and calculated to recommend the Goſpel to the favourable notice, at leaſt to reſtrain the fury of its adverſaries. God, as it were, publicly declared the cauſe of the priſoner to be his own, and all,

all, who paid any ſerious attention to that teſtimony, muſt have perceived that oppoſition was vain, fooliſh, and wicked. Who ſhall preſume to fight againſt Him?

The multitude were diſappointed of the entertainment, which had been promiſed them in the tortures and death of the Apoſtle. The bloody perſecutor commanded diligent ſearch to be made for his intended victim; but Peter was ſecured from his rage: the Lord concealed him, as he had done Baruch and Jeremiah on a ſimilar occaſion*. Thus the pride of the tyrant was mortified, when he found himſelf robbed of his prey; but his heart refuſed to be humbled. He ought to have confeſſed his own iniquity, for having deſigned to take away an innocent life. But alas! in what numerous inſtances are we conſtrained to remark the blindneſs and obduracy of men in a ſtate of impenitence! "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not ſee;" they will not believe or regard the manifeſt interpoſitions of Heaven: but the time is coming, when "they ſhall ſee, and be aſhamed for their envy at the people †." Whatever might be Herod's view of the matter, he doubtleſs wiſhed to diſcredit the miracle, and prevent its influence upon the public mind. He ſlew the guards, to whoſe care Peter was committed, that the eſcape of the priſoner might be aſcribed to their negligence. It has been a common device with the enemies of Chriſtianity to ſpread falſe reports, and give a wrong ſtatement of real facts, in order

* Jer. xxxvi. 26.

† Iſa. xxvi. 11.

to prejudice others, and obviate the probable effect of the truth. We should therefore be afraid of listening to any misrepresentations of the religion of the Gospel. Let us examine with strict impartiality, and judge with the most serious deliberation. Shall we not be inexcusable, if through inattention we suffer ourselves to be imposed on, and tricked out of our salvation, "by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive * ?"

Perhaps, Herod declined all further persecution of the Church: but the cries of them, whom he had oppressed, "entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." The blood, which he had shed, and that also, which he had designed to shed, demanded vengeance against him. Yet he was spared for some time. God is patient and exerciseth much forbearance towards his enemies. Why else is not the common course of events obstructed, and the world itself destroyed? Considering the daring provocations of his creatures, we may wonder, that He doth not make bare his arm, and consume them in his anger. But his justice will strike at the last. "If the wicked turn not, He will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors †."

Herod removed from Jerusalem to Cesarea, to celebrate certain games, as Josephus reports, in honour of the Roman Emperor. Here we shall behold him, at one moment in a state of high dignity and glory,

* Eph. iv. 14. † Psal. vii. 12, 13.

at

at another debafed even to the duft. During his refidence at Cefarea, the Tyrians and Sidonians, whom he had threatened with war for fome offence, fent a deputation to him, profeffing fubmiffion, and deprecating his anger. Through the influence of the king's chamberlain, they obtained the defired reconciliation; and the plan of hoftilities was relinquifhed. But Herod, for the gratification of his own exceffive vanity by a pompous difplay of his greatnefs, gave a public audience to the ambaffadors, and endeavoured to imprefs them with an idea of his abilities, magnificence, and power. He had provided for the purpofe a fplendid robe of richeft texture, which, according to Jofephus, was fo exquifitely wrought with filver, that, when the fun fhone upon it, the eyes of fpectators were dazzled. Thus arrayed, he entered the crowded theatre, and feated himfelf upon a throne of ftate, defirous to attract the general notice, admiration, and applaufe.

He exhibited all the grandeur of his majefty, and it fhould feem that he was alfo oftentatious of his eloquence. He addreffed the affembly in a fpeech prepared for the occafion; the purport of which was, moft probably, to celebrate his own power and clemency before the gazing multitude. They were not backward to pay him the deference he wifhed for. They might be ftruck with a pleafing aftonifhment, or, perceiving his defign, were difpofed to gratify his pride by expreffions of grofs adulation. They gave a fhout, declaring their high admiration; and, as if they were ready to exalt him above the rank

rank of mortals, by giving him divine honours, they cried out, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." This was profane language indeed, and the more ſo, as many of the company had been inſtructed to worſhip none but Jehovah. The king himſelf was ſufficiently acquainted with the ſacred ſcriptures, to be convinced that ſuch adoration was impious in the extreme, and he ought to have rejected it with abhorrence. But he was evidently delighted, and, being elated with vanity, conſented to receive that homage, which ſhould be paid only to our Almighty Creator. "He gave not God the glory:" he did not refer the people to Him, and, as if he forgot his own entire dependence, acknowledged not his obligations to the ſovereign Lord of all, for the diſtinguiſhed eminence, to which he was raiſed.

Such was Herod; ſet up as ſomething more than human, revered as a deity by flattering paraſites, and fooliſh enough to be pleaſed with their idolatrous oblations of praiſe. The abſurdity as well as wickedneſs of the king in this tranſaction may ſurpriſe us; but we ſhall ceaſe to wonder, if we ſeriouſly attend to the ſtate of our fallen nature. Pride is moſt unſuitable to us, as creatures and ſinners; yet, though "not made for men," it is interwoven in our very frame. We are not unwilling to be extolled for excellencies which we do not poſſeſs; we wiſh to renounce our ſubjection to Him who made us, and claim a conſequence and reſpect, which are due only to Divinity itſelf. There are peculiar ſnares and dangers attendant on perſons in an elevated rank: they are more

more eſpecially liable to be puffed up with a conceit of their own importance. "Man, being in honour," not only "abideth not," but "is like the beaſts that periſh *." Such a ſituation too often ſtupifies the mind, and renders it incapable of proper diſcernment; and then he, who is the object of general admiration and applauſe, is not himſelf, and cannot make a fair eſtimate of things. Or, like the brute animals, he is engroſſed with ſuch matters, as are immediately within his view, to the neglect and contempt of ſuch as are remote. Accordingly, the hiſtory of mankind will furniſh many inſtances of thoſe, who, having riſen to great power, claimed and received titles and profeſſions of homage, which are the unalienable and excluſive right of the Lord Almighty. Let none among ourſelves preſume, that we, if placed in eminent ſtations, ſhould be ſecure from ſuch effects. Let us all, rather, ſuſpect our own hearts, and pray earneſtly, that God may ſubdue our natural vanity, and keep us humble under a ſenſe of our inſignificance, weakneſs, and depravity.

An exemplary puniſhment was inflicted on the haughty king. In the midſt of all his ſplendour, while he was elated with the notion of his own ſuperior excellence, as if he were a god, he felt a mortifying conviction, and exhibited a melancholy proof, of his helpleſſneſs and mortality. He was inſtantly ſeized with excruciating pains, forced to confeſs his folly and wretchedneſs to his idolatrous admirers, and, after

* Pſal. xlix. 12.

a few days of extreme suffering, became a loathsome corpse. Many learned solutions, probably, may be given, and physical reasons assigned for his extraordinary death. But St. Luke, the sacred historian, though himself a physician, ascribes it solely to the immediate vengeance of Heaven: "the Angel of the Lord smote him." We ask not for any other explanation; and we lament that so many seem determined to ascribe every event to natural principles and second causes, unwilling to acknowledge the first great cause of all, or to allow the God of nature any influence in the government of the universe.

The visitation of God in this case was the more remarkable, as it followed immediately upon the sin, which had provoked his anger. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily: therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil *." But here justice overtook the offender with swift steps, and exhibited him to public view, even in the moment of his highest exaltation and triumph, as a signal instance of the divine vengeance against pride and persecution. Thus, while Nebuchadnezzar boastingly exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" there fell a voice from heaven, saying, "The kingdom is departed from thee †." Belshazzar, also, in the very act of "lifting up himself against the Lord of heaven," was confounded by the

* Eccles. viii. 11. † Dan. iv. 30, 31.

handwriting, which declared, that, being weighed in the balances and found wanting, he ſhould ſoon be deprived of his dominion *.

The particular nature of Herod's puniſhment ſeems deſigned to ſhew the odiouſneſs of his ſin. He was preſumptuouſly elated, and therefore God determined to reduce him to the loweſt ſtate of abaſement. As he received with complacency the impious adulations of the people, and probably indulged the conceit, that he was advanced above the lot of humanity, he became a weak and defenceleſs prey to the meaneſt and moſt loathſome vermin. "He was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghoſt." Bred in the putrefaction, which ſeized his frame, they ſuddenly attacked his vitals, and rendered him an object of miſery and abhorrence. Who could then envy or admire his ſplendour and greatneſs? Who could any longer bow the knee to worſhip him? He cried out in the anguiſh of his heart; his pampered body was ſoon turned into corruption; and all his pomp and dignity were laid in the duſt.

"Lord, what is man!" "Verily, at his beſt eſtate, he is altogether vanity †." His mental faculties, glorious and excellent as they are, afford no ground for boaſting, ſince in a moment they may be impaired or deranged. His outward form may be comely, but it is a ſhort-lived flower, and may be inſtantly blaſted in the height of its gaiety. "When thou, Lord, with rebukes doſt correct man for iniquity, thou makeſt his beauty to conſume away like a moth:

* Dan. v. 22—28. † Pſal. cxliv. 3. xxxix. 5.

 ſurely

ſurely every man is vanity *." Let thoſe, who pride themſelves in a vigorous conſtitution, a graceful perſon, or an eloquent addreſs, contemplate the caſe of Herod, and be aſhamed of their fooliſh oſtentation. Can you bear to be told, that not only ſhall worms devour your fleſh in the grave, but poſſibly thoſe loathſome creatures may receive a commiſſion againſt you, and render you, in your moſt proſperous ſtate upon earth, a terror to yourſelves and others? O ſeek for ſomething better, than any of thoſe decorations or accompliſhments, of which you may be ſo ſoon deprived! The grace of Jeſus is a ſure and never-failing treaſure to the ſincere believer. O labour to obtain the "one thing needful!" It is "that good part, which ſhall not be taken away †."

This hiſtory will teach us to be thankful for the outward peace and ſecurity, which the Church of Chriſt, eſtabliſhed among us, now enjoys. The religious privileges, afforded us in this country, are ſingularly great. Let us praiſe God, that we are the ſubjects, not of a furious and perſecuting tyrant, but of "a nurſing-father" to our Zion. Let us give diligence to improve our ineſtimable advantages to good purpoſe, and be afraid leſt our negligence or diſcontent ſhould provoke God to withdraw them.

Yet thoſe, who "ſuffer for righteouſneſs' ſake," have no real cauſe to dread their moſt violent and powerful oppoſers. The ſtrength of your enemies, when exerted againſt the cauſe of God, is feeble and contemptible. While we refer you to Herod, we aſk, "Who art

* Pſal. xxxix. 11. † Luke x. 42.

thou,

thou, that thou ſhouldſt be afraid of a man that ſhall die, and of the ſon of man, which ſhall be made as graſs?—and haſt feared continually every day becauſe of the fury of the oppreſſor, as if he were ready to deſtroy? And where is the fury of the oppreſſor *?" The Lord will ſurely maintain his own truth; and perhaps the perſecution, which appears moſt formidable, may eventually promote its advancement. Herod, who "ſtretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church," was cut down; "but the word of God grew and multiplied." O learn to truſt your concerns with your faithful and Almighty Protector! "Cry out and ſhout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Iſrael in the midſt of thee †." "No weapon that is formed againſt thee ſhall proſper; and every tongue, that ſhall riſe againſt thee in judgment, thou ſhalt condemn ‡."

From the character and tremendous puniſhment of Herod, a ſuitable occaſion is given, to warn others of his ſpirit and conduct. Many in private life are diſpoſed to deride and oppreſs thoſe, who appear zealous for the faith and practice of the Goſpel. We would argue with them concerning the unreaſonableneſs and danger of their oppoſition, and aſk, Who are you, that you ſhould wiſh to direct another man's conſcience? Whatever influence or authority you poſſeſs, preſume not to ſet yourſelves up in the place of the ſupreme Judge, or to uſurp dominion "over God's heritage." Your perſecution is as fooliſh, as it is baſe. It may, probably, deter hypo-

* Iſa. li. 12, 13. † xii. 6. ‡ liv. 17.

crites, but it will render ſincere believers more firm and courageous in their profeſſion. They, who truly underſtand the worth of Chriſt and his ſalvation, will not deſert his ſervice on account of the difficulties, which you may throw in their way. Yet, while you are endeavouring to keep men in ignorance and ſin, the tendency of your conduct is to deceive and ruin their immortal ſouls: and in this view you muſt be ranked amongſt robbers and aſſaſſins of the moſt heinous kind. If you conſider likewiſe, that your oppoſition is in fact levelled againſt God himſelf, your guilt will appear peculiarly enormous. You exert your influence to prevent a due ſubjection to his authority, and therefore you are promoting rebellion in his government. And do you not tremble for the conſequence? He will aſſuredly reckon with you for your profane deriſion of his word, and injurious treatment of his people. Perhaps, you may be made, like Herod, a monument of vengeance: for we have heard of many ſimilar caſes. At leaſt, the time is coming, when, if you repent not, Jehovah "will ſpeak unto you in his wrath, and vex you in his ſore diſpleaſure *."

We caution our readers, alſo, to beware of that haughtineſs of ſpirit, which the king of Judea betrayed. "God reſiſteth the proud," and determines that "they ſhall be abaſed." Yet are we not all, in one reſpect or another, chargeable with this ſin? Has it not been our aim and ſtudy to diſplay ourſelves, our abilities, poſſeſſions, or performances, in an oſtenta-

* Pſal. ii. 5.

tious

tious manner? Have we not claimed the credit, and refused to "give God the glory?" There is no superiority, mental or corporeal, which we can enjoy, but pride will find in it occasion of boasting and triumph. We are continually in danger of exalting the creature to the neglect of the Creator. O let us look with a holy jealousy on our most admired advantages; for, whatever they may be, if God be not acknowledged and served in them, they will prove the means of aggravated guilt and everlasting destruction!

How many are cut down, like Herod, in the midst of their vanity and profaneness! Do not the frequent instances of the sudden deaths of profligate offenders excite an alarm amongst us? We entreat the attention of the careless and impenitent to this tremendous subject. Any other sin, as well as those which appeared in the character before us, will, if persisted in, expose you to the fierce anger of Almighty God. His hand is lifted up; and, perhaps, he may shortly strike the fatal blow. What, then, is your hope, "when God taketh away your soul *?" Ah! "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear †?" The acute disease, by which Herod perished, was only an omen and warning of that infinitely more terrible misery, which awaited him. "He was eaten of worms:" but there is a worm, "which dieth not," and which will be for ever gnawing the consciences of them "that obey not the Gospel of God." Is not this more than you can bear to think of? Yet remember, it is decreed, that

* Job xxvii. 8. † 1 Pet. iv. 18.

"though hand join in hand, the wicked ſhall not be unpuniſhed *." And, perhaps, the irrevocable ſentence may inſtantly go forth, "This night thy ſoul ſhall be required of thee †." O ſeek forgiveneſs by the blood of the croſs! Seek the renovation of your hearts in righteouſneſs, by the grace of the Spirit! "To day, if ye will hear the voice of God, harden not your hearts ‡." Submit to him without reſerve, and you ſhall know, that He, who is terrible in his anger, "delighteth in mercy. He will ſubdue your iniquities, and caſt all your ſins into the depths of the ſea §."

* Prov. xi. 21. † Luke xii. 20. ‡ Heb. iv. 7.
§ Mic. vii. 18, 19.

ONESIMUS.

CHAP. XII.

Onesimus, the servant of Philemon—robbed his master—fled to Rome—there converted through St. Paul's ministry—returned to his master with the Apostle's recommendation—was affectionately received by the Church as a brother—and probably admitted into the sacred ministry.

WHILE we are considering the characters of men, we ought to perceive and admire the glory and perfections of God in his conduct towards them. The government, which He exercises over our fallen race, exhibits an astonishing view of his love, no less than of his power. Such a view is given us in every instance of the conversion of a sinner. Cases of this nature are always to be regarded as events of peculiar magnitude. They discover the exceeding greatness of that grace, which can pardon and sanctify the rebellious; and therefore, as far as they are made known to us, demand our serious attention.

The person, who is here proposed as the subject of our meditations, claims our notice on this ground. The sacred volume, indeed, does not contain a large account; but the few circumstances, recorded of him, will

will furniſh us with important inſtruction. He had been placed in a mean ſituation, and his conduct had been infamous; but, the doctrine of the croſs having reached his heart with a mighty energy, he became an honourable and uſeful member both of ſociety and of the Church of God. May we, like the holy Angels, rejoice over the repenting ſinner! May we contemplate the change with gratitude and delight, and prove by our future obedience, that we have obtained the ſame mercy!

Oneſimus was no more than a common ſlave, but probably did not feel the hardſhips, generally attendant on ſuch a condition; and he was favoured with opportunities of gaining religious knowledge and improvement. His maſter Philemon profeſſed and adorned the Goſpel, having a church in his houſe, and being diſtinguiſhed for his "love and faith toward the Lord Jeſus and toward all ſaints." It ſhould ſeem, alſo, that he was a faithful preacher, for St. Paul addreſſes him as his "dearly beloved and fellow labourer *." The meaneſt ſervant, in ſuch a pious family, doubtleſs enjoyed peculiar advantages of a ſpiritual kind. But no external means can change the heart. Oneſimus retained his ſituation without any apparent benefit from the prayers, inſtructions, admonitions, or example of his excellent maſter; and on this account his guilt was more highly aggravated. To continue careleſs and impenitent, under the conſtant obſervation of the efficacious and happy influence of real religion,

* Philem. 1, &c.

manifeſts

manifests the deepest depravity: it implies more than gross ignorance, an avowed contempt and rejection of God and his truth.

O consider, if you are the members of such an houshold, as that of Philemon, What improvement are you making of the valuable opportunities afforded you? Have you not yet to learn the way of righteousness, though you have long been taught? Do you not neglect your souls, though continually warned of your danger? You are summoned to the worship of God, both at Church and at home: but do you not still remain strangers to prayer? What account, then, shall you be able to give? Should you die in unbelief, your masters and parents, whose exhortations you have despised, will witness against you: and that situation, which might have proved an inestimable blessing, will eventually be your heaviest curse.

Onesimus was not merely thoughtless, but destitute of all principles of probity. He betrayed his trust in Philemon's service, and then absconded with the pilfered property. Is the heinousness of dishonesty sufficiently considered? Are you, to whom the concerns of others are committed, strictly attentive to your obligations? Do you hate robbery, even in the smallest degree? And are all your transactions such, as you could bear to produce to the public view? O remember, there is a God in heaven, who narrowly inspects your private dealings, and will expose every fraudulent practice at the day of judgment: Will not this be to your unspeakable confusion? Determine, then, to suffer any difficulties, rather than waste or embezzle what is deposited

deposited with you. Let "no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such *."

From this view of Onesimus's state and conduct we should have apprehended every thing bad: and had he received the just recompense of his iniquity, or been left to follow, without restraint, the devices of his own heart, the consequence must have been fatal. But a different scene opens upon us; and we turn from the profligacy of the sinner, to behold the rich and sovereign grace of our God in Jesus Christ.

Onesimus, having basely deserted his master, probably became a wanderer and a vagabond. In that state, under the controlling influence of divine Providence, his steps were directed to Rome; and there, by some means or other, he was brought under the ministry of St. Paul, who, though a prisoner, was permitted to preach the Gospel in his own house. What were Onesimus's motives for attending the Apostle, we know not; but the event was blessed. The wretched rambler was suddenly arrested; an arrow of conviction from the Lord pierced his heart; he confessed his guilt, and obtained mercy through that Saviour, of whom he then heard. A total renovation took place within him: he "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty," and desired to serve God in righteousness and true holiness. He was more than reformed; he was made "a new creature." This, said Paul, is "my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds."

Here, then, is a striking instance, and undeniable

* 1 Thess. iv. 6.

proof,

proof, of the extensiveness and power of that grace, which God has exhibited in the Gospel. He can save those, whose cases to us appear desperate. He can pardon the most aggravated sins, and wash away stains of the deepest die. He can turn the most obdurate rebel into a faithful subject. Accumulated offences, and confirmed habits of wickedness, are no obstruction to the exercise of his mercy and the influence of his Spirit, on those, whom He is pleased to visit with his salvation. On this ground, we may be encouraged to entertain a pleasing hope for others, and to offer importunate supplications for ourselves.

Some are disposed to ask, Why does the Lord permit the objects of his choice to proceed so far and continue so long in their evil courses? Why does he not prevent the mischief, which they bring upon themselves and their connections? "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God * ?" Instead of giving way to curious enquiries and presumptuous cavillings concerning his dispensations, we should rather bow before him with unfeigned humility, and confess that we have no right to question the wisdom or the equity of his proceedings. Many of his reasons are concealed from us; but that part of his conduct, which he has condescended to explain, demands our admiration, love, and praise; and, even when his appointments appear to us strange and unaccountable, we should rest assured, that He doeth all things well. At the last day, it will be incontestably demonstrated, that

* Rom. ix. 20.

"the

" the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works *."

We grant that He suffers men, for whom he has " thoughts of peace and not of evil," to gratify their own perverse desires, and make a daring progress in wickedness. Thus he takes occasion to humble them more effectually, after they have given full proof of their depravity by their atrocious conduct. He exhibits in a more conspicuous light the sovereignty of his mercy, while he convinces them by their own experience, that they deserve to perish, even as others, and that they are indebted to his Almighty grace for the salutary change, which is produced. It is observable, too, that persons of this description, when they have embraced the Gospel, generally possess a stronger and livelier sense of the value of redemption, and their obligations to the Saviour, than those who have not run into the same irregularities. They feel the more fervent love, as being more deeply impressed with the persuasion, that they have much forgiven †. Are there not evident marks of the divine wisdom and goodness in this procedure? We confess, however, that the subject involves difficulties, which we pretend not to explain; and we caution our readers to suspect their own reasonings and conclusions, which are not expressly warranted by the scriptures. While we maintain and rejoice in the full liberty of the Gospel, let us beware of abusing it to the purposes of licentiousness. " Where sin abounded, grace did much more

* Psal. cxlv. 17. † Lu. vii. 47.

abound.

abound.—What ſhall we ſay then? Shall we continue in ſin, that grace may abound? God forbid *." We reject ſuch an inference with abhorrence.

It is the high prerogative of Him, "who worketh all things after the counſel of his own will †," to bring good out of evil, and to glorify himſelf even by the diſobedience of his creatures: yet this does not in any meaſure palliate their guilt. The wickedneſs of Joſeph's brethren, in conſpiring againſt him and ſelling him into Egypt, was eventually the means of great and numerous advantages, and deſigned to be ſo by the divine appointment. But, as they acted from the baſeſt motives, they were perfectly inexcuſable. "Ye thought evil againſt me," ſaid Joſeph, "but God meant it unto good ‡." It pleaſed the Lord, likewiſe, to render the diſhoneſty of Oneſimus, though truly deteſtable, ſubſervient to the moſt gracious purpoſes. This, at leaſt, led the way to his converſion; and who ſhall ſay, that it was not permitted, in order to fix upon his heart a deep conviction of his depravity? What elſe could be the ſenſe of the Apoſtle, when he obſerved to Philemon, "Perhaps, he therefore departed for a ſeaſon, that thou ſhouldſt receive him for ever?" This gives us an aſtoniſhing view of the diſpenſations of God. He preſerves his own holineſs; and yet, the very ſins, which are moſt hateful to him, form a part of his plan, inaſmuch as he intends to make uſe of them, in various inſtances, for the recovery of the offenders. They follow their own perverſe inclinations, whilſt he ſecretly conducts them to

* Rom. v. 20. vi. 1, 2. † Eph. i. 11. ‡ Gen. l. 20.

those

thoſe places and connections, in which a bleſſing awaits them. Theſe caſes frequently occur; but many of them, at preſent, may be wiſely concealed from public view, ſince men of corrupt minds would thence take occaſion to blaſpheme the truth, and harden themſelves in their iniquity. But hereafter they will all be diſplayed, and furniſh the redeemed of the Lord with additional reaſons for admiring, loving, and praiſing Him throughout eternity.

Such alſo is the ſovereign Providence of God, that he can never be at a loſs for means to accompliſh his own purpoſes. He "waits to be gracious," and ſends repeated calls and offers of mercy to thoſe, who perſiſt in their rebellion. Yet he is not, he cannot be, diſappointed: if one method fails for reducing them to obedience, another is at hand. Oneſimus fled from the admonitions of his pious maſter, but in his flight, though this was no part of his intention, he came under the miniſtry of St. Paul, and there received the bleſſing of a new heart. The Lord God, though not confined in his agency, generally honours the ordinances of his own appointment; and while men ſeek to evade thoſe exhortations, which are painful to them, he is often pleaſed to bring them under the ſound of his word in a different ſituation, and to produce in them ſuch a change, as they neither expected nor deſired. But, by whatever inſtrument a ſpiritual renovation is effected, the whole glory ſhould be aſcribed to Him, "who worketh all in all *."

This is not a ſubject of mere ſpeculation. Con-

* 1 Cor. xii. 6.

version extends not to the judgment only, but to the inward principles and tempers, and will appear in the outward conduct. In some instances sufficient time may not be allowed, to give a public and decisive proof of its reality. We do not assert, that in these cases there is no evidence to be depended on, but none of that sort, which we are authorized to require as indispensably necessary, where life is spared, and opportunities of doing good are afforded. "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk *." "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven †."

St. Paul without hesitation pronounced Onesimus a convert; and, doubtless, the change was evinced to his satisfaction. The poor fugitive slave felt a deep conviction of his guilt, and especially of the theft, which he had committed. He opened his distress, and made a frank confession to the Apostle, that through him he might implore forgiveness from his much injured master. Repentance is always accompanied with a painful remembrance of sin, a sense of its evil, and a readiness to acknowledge both to God and men every wrong, which we have done. If the mischief, which we have occasioned, cannot be repaired, yet we should prove our godly sorrow by an honest and unreserved declaration of our baseness. An anxious endeavour to deny or conceal, to justify or palliate our misconduct, will give sufficient ground for suspecting an unsoundness of heart.

* Eph. iv. 17. † Mat. v. 16.

Onesimus was willing to return to the post, which he had so shamefully deserted, and desirous by a strict attention to his duty to be useful to that honourable person, who had suffered through his former treachery. This was a favourable sign. It ought never to be forgotten, that true religion will direct our regard to the respective places in life, which we have forsaken or neglected, and dispose us to discharge our appointed offices for the benefit of those, to whom we have been injurious. The sincere penitent will enquire, How may I serve and glorify God in my situation? How may I now fulfil those obligations, which I have basely violated in time past? I have wronged and grieved my nearest connections, my parents or master, my children or servants: in what way may I now be enabled to promote their advantage and comfort? But those, who feel no such concern about their future conduct, who are not solicitous to answer some more profitable purpose, than they have already done, know not the grace of God in truth: their religion is vain.

In order to probe the wound more perfectly, we observe, that, if your consciences be distressed by the recollection of any trespass or injury, which you have committed, you must endeavour to make reparation according to the utmost of your ability. If you refuse this, your professions of penitence are hypocritical. Onesimus, probably, could not restore to Philemon what he had stolen; but he acknowledged his obligation to do it. St. Paul admitted the demands of the master, and, taking the obligation of the servant upon himself, expressly confirmed the intentions and the duty

of

of his convert. Thus the Apoſtle writes, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account: I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it."

Oneſimus, having obtained forgiveneſs with God, was cordially received by the Church, and from that time held in conſiderable reputation. St. Paul commends him to the notice of the Coloſſians, as "a faithful and beloved brother, who was one of them *." And eccleſiaſtical hiſtory relates, that he was afterwards admitted into the ſacred miniſtry, and laboured diligently for the converſion of others. What an aſtoniſhing and happy change, then, was here accompliſhed! How excellent is that ſyſtem of faith, which is calculated to produce theſe glorious effects! "Inſtead of the thorn ſhall come up the fir-tree, and inſtead of the brier ſhall come up the myrtle-tree: and it ſhall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlaſting ſign that ſhall not be cut off †." After ſuch a repreſentation, it will not ſurely be objected, that the doctrines of the Goſpel are of a licentious tendency. Through the gracious proviſion which God has made in Jeſus Chriſt, there is free and plenteous redemption for thoſe, who have been moſt abandoned in principle and conduct. But, conſiſtently with this truth, we maintain that thoſe, whom the Lord pardons, He alſo ſanctifies, and that believers muſt prove their ſincerity by abounding in all the fruits of righteouſneſs. Do we not, then, effectually ſecure the intereſts of morality and holineſs?

Some, perhaps, object to the kindneſs and cordiality,

* Col. iv. 9. † Iſa. lv. 13.

lity, with which such converts are usually received among Christians: but this very circumstance, which excites disgust, displays the strong influence of our religion. If there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over repenting sinners *, shall not the saints on earth participate of the same generous affection and disinterested pleasure? Shall not all, who love the Lord, shew the tenderest regard for those, who are reconciled to him, without exception of rank, or even of their former character? If he vouchsafe to admit them into his family as his sons and daughters, who are we, that we should treat them with contempt or neglect? The grace of God will teach us, that "we were by nature the children of wrath, even as others †," and dispose us to love all those as brethren, who appear to be renewed by the same Spirit. "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this our brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found ‡."

Paul, though an Apostle, rejoiced over Onesimus, who was no better than a poor slave, and whose conduct had been infamous. He did not urge against him his mean condition, or his atrocious crimes; but, believing him to be born of God, he embraced him as a fellow-heir, earnestly interceded for him with Philemon, and with the overflowings of parental affection exulted in him as his own child. Do we not feel very forcibly our obligations to Christian love, while we observe with what tenderness and fervour St. Paul commends this young convert to the favour-

* Luke xv. 10. † Eph. ii. 3. ‡ Luke xv. 32.

able

able notice of his master: "I beseech thee," says he, "for my son Onesimus;—thou therefore receive him, that is mine own bowels;—not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord! If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself." Probably, Philemon complied with the request in its full extent, pardoned the returning slave, treated him with affectionate regard, and rejoiced at the change. Let us likewise learn, to lay aside our envious resentments, and, without adverting to past circumstances, if only we are now united together in the bonds of the Covenant, and "called in one hope of our calling," let us, as brethren of the same father, "love one another with a pure heart fervently."

But, while we contend for the exercise of an enlarged benevolence towards all Christians, we maintain that the Gospel does not reduce the different ranks and orders of society to a level, nay, rather that it requires the observance of those distinctions. Onesimus might possibly resume his post in Philemon's houshold, and yet be treated on a spiritual account, "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved." This spiritual regard we may pay to our pious labourers and meanest dependents, as the children of God and the heirs of glory, while we continue to insist on their subjection and obedience. We lament the forwardness of some, who seem to think they are exempted from subordination, in consequence of their religious knowledge and attainments. They obtrude

themſelves with a degree of inſolence on the notice of their ſuperiors, as if in a civil ſenſe there muſt be a perfect equality among thoſe, who are one in Chriſt. Surely this betrays groſs miſconceptions of our religion, or much haughtineſs of temper. "Let as many ſervants, as are under the yoke, count their own maſters worthy of all honour; that the name of God and his doctrine be not blaſphemed. And they that have believing maſters, let them not deſpiſe them, becauſe they are brethren," (as if they were all on a level), "but rather," remembering the appointments of Providence, "do them ſervice *."

Perſons of higher rank ſhould alſo learn to correct their proud and diſdainful behaviour towards their inferiors. They have a right to uſe their labours; yet they ſhould treat them with all gentleneſs of manners. Theſe worldly diſtinctions will ſoon ceaſe, and only that grand diſcrimination of characters, which the grace of God produces, will laſt for ever. If, therefore, we diſcover the image of the Saviour in them, who are ſubject to our authority, they ſhould be particularly dear to us for his ſake, and we ſhould rejoice over them from the delightful expectation, that we ſhall meet them in heaven. There Oneſimus and Philemon, with their beloved Paul, are worſhipping in the ſame company. There may we alſo, and our reſpective families, make up the houſhold of faith, and join in the ſame acclamations of praiſe before the throne of God and of the Lamb!

The example before us may encourage the moſt

* 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

atrocious

atrocious ſinners to return to God with the hope of finding mercy; but the ſubject is ſhamefully perverted, if it imbolden any to perſiſt in their evil courſes. Shall you dare to ſay, For the preſent I will give a looſe to my heart's deſires, but on ſome future day I will repent, and doubt not of obtaining forgiveneſs, even as Oneſimus? Does the work of converſion lie within your own power? Or can you claim the grace, which alone is able to effect it? Are the inſtances of ſuch a change, in perſons rejecting the Goſpel, ſo numerous, as to warrant your concluſion, that you ſhall certainly be recovered? On the contrary, do you not ſee many ſuddenly taken away in their iniquities; and do not others, who are ſpared a longer time, become more and more obdurate, till, as we fear, they "fill up their ſins," and periſh with aggravated ruin for their contempt of ſalvation? Preſume not, then, on diſtant opportunities, which may never be granted: reſiſt not your preſent convictions, leſt they ſhould return no more. You have trifled too much already: O give the remainder of your ſhort life to Him, for whoſe ſervice you were made: thankfully accept his offered mercy, and endeavour to improve every ſucceeding day for his glory!

HOLY ANGELS.

CHAP. XIII.

Angels, their nature, character, and situation — are God's ministers, and perform his purposes—study and admire the plan of redemption—announced the birth of Jesus—worshipped him—attended him—declared his resurrection—rejoice in the conversion of sinners—watch over believers—will accompany Jesus to the last judgment—summon the world—approve and execute the different sentences—will be for ever employed in praising God—confirmed in their holy and happy state—and united with redeemed saints.

IN contemplating the various characters of men, we perceive much cause to mourn for the sad effects, which sin has produced upon the earth. Some of these characters exhibit nothing but evil. Others discover a real excellency of disposition and conduct: but such are their defects, so interrupted their obedience, that even in them the purposes of Heaven seem, as yet, to be imperfectly answered. Our species evidently appears in a fallen state; an extreme depravity universally prevails, which is offensive to God, obscures his glory, and spreads confusion and misery through the whole system of human affairs.

Possibly, there may be other worlds, where no such apostasy

apoſtaſy has taken place, and where Jehovah, the great Lord of all, is continually receiving the full tribute of honour, love, and ſervice from thouſands of intelligent and holy creatures. We have certain information, that there is one bleſſed ſociety of this kind, the Angels of God in heaven, who will furniſh us with matter of uſeful and delightful meditation, when we are diſtreſſed by a view of our own unhappy circumſtances.

Theſe exalted beings are, as much as ourſelves, the workmanſhip of God, and as entirely dependent upon him. It ſhould ſeem, that they were brought into exiſtence before the human ſpecies; but they were made, even as we, in ſubjection to the holy law of God, and are required always to do his will, and ſhew forth his praiſe. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou haſt created all things, and for thy pleaſure they are and were created *."

They are ſpirits, poſſeſſed of large intellectual faculties; and though they have not fleſh and bones †, nor any corporeal form, like our's, they can become viſible to us, when commiſſioned for ſpecial purpoſes. They are alſo endued with vigour of a ſuperior ſort; and accordingly they have produced effects, to which no human exertions would be equal. They are called "mighty Angels," and are ſaid to "excel in ſtrength ‡." Their chief reſidence is in heaven, where the ever-bleſſed God manifeſts the ſplendour of his Majeſty; and where they are permitted "to behold the beauty

* Rev. iv. 11. † Luke xxiv. 39. ‡ 2 Theſſ. i. 7. Pſal. ciii. 20.

of

of the Lord." Whilst, however, it is their privilege to appear in his immediate presence, they display his sovereignty and glory by bowing at his footstool. The society is extremely numerous. When Daniel saw "the Antient of days" sitting on his throne, such was the prophet's computation of his attendant armies; "Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten "thousand times ten thousand stood before him *." Our Lord declared, that he could have procured for his assistance "more than twelve legions of Angels †;" and it is further asserted, that their company is "innumerable ‡." They are distinguished into different orders, and possess different degrees of glory and perfection: this seems to be implied, when they are represented as "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers §." Two of the celestial Hierarchy are mentioned under the names of Michael and Gabriel; and, from the transactions in which they bore a part, we may consider them as obtaining a preference, and as filling the places of peculiar eminence and dignity ||.

But, however they may be discriminated by various measures of excellence, they are all adorned with a splendour, which human eyes, in our present state, could not bear. Some of the most advanced saints on earth have been confounded by their appearance. There is no defect in any of them. They are completely holy, and completely happy: being in all respects conformed to the will of God, they enjoy the constant assurances of his love. They can therefore

* Dan. vii. 9, 10. † Matt. xxvi. 53. ‡ Heb. xii. 22.
§ Col. i. 16. || Jude 9. Lu. i. 19.

tell, from their own experience, that "in his presence is fulneſs of joy; at his right hand there are pleaſures for evermore *." In them let us admire the great Creator, from whom they have derived whatever they poſſeſs, and who alone is "the perfection of beauty." To him let us look in fervent prayer for the communications of his grace, if we wiſh to reſemble theſe bleſſed ſpirits.

Let us enquire

I. What is their employment in the preſent adminiſtration of the divine government. The Lord himſelf, by his continual and ſovereign agency, upholds and regulates every part of the univerſe, which he hath made. He wants no aſſiſtance; yet he is pleaſed to accompliſh his purpoſes by various inſtruments, which he uſes, not through weakneſs as earthly monarchs do, but for the diſplay of his power and the glory of his majeſty. The holy Angels are called his "chariots;" and "the Lord is among them," riding, as it were, in great ſtate and triumph †. They ſurround his throne with unceaſing ſongs of praiſe and adoration, and ſtand ready to fly wherever he ſhall appoint. They are called his "miniſters;" and, when commiſſioned by him for the execution of any plan, they proceed without heſitation, upon the firſt intimation of his will, being lively, quick, and penetrating, as "a flaming fire ‡." They "do his commandments," perfectly fulfilling all his pleaſure, and eſteeming it their honour to be employed in his ſervice; yet they wait for his injunctions, "hearken-

* Pſal. xvi. 11. † Pſal. lxviii. 17. xviii. 10. ‡ civ. 4.

ing

ing unto the voice of his word *." A revolt, indeed, has taken place among them, in consequence of which many of their company were driven out of heaven. But these, of whom we now speak, have uniformly and in every instance maintained their obedience.

They are interested in the concerns of this lower world. When the Lord "laid the foundations of the earth," they "sang together and shouted for joy †;" and from the beginning, as the instruments of divine Providence, they have borne a part in the administration of human affairs. Throughout the scripture history, we remark the interposition of Angels. By them the saints of God have been directed in their duty, warned of impending dangers, relieved under distresses, and rescued from enemies. We need not be particular in referring to examples. "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them ‡." To such the promise is express, "He shall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone §." But they have been commissioned, also, to execute judgment, as well as to perform acts of kindness. Thus "an Angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it ‖." Thus the camp of the enemy of God was once visited by the sword of an avenger: at midnight the cry of death was heard in the hosts of Sennacherib, and, when morning rose, the slaughter of thousands testified to the haughty

* Psal. ciii. 20, 21. † Job xxxviii. 4, 7. ‡ Psal. xxxiv. 7. § xci. 11, 12. ‖ 2 Sam. xxiv. 16.

monarch

monarch the ſtroke of an inviſible arm *. To a ſimilar agency we are taught, alſo, to aſcribe the ſudden deſtruction of that tyrant Herod, who was ſmitten with a mortal diſeaſe in the moment of his profane exultation †.

Such are the facts, which antient hiſtory records: and what reaſon can be aſſigned, why we ſhould not believe theſe celeſtial meſſengers to be employed among ourſelves, as they were in former times? Though we do not diſcern their intervention, and cannot aſcertain its extent or effects, yet it ought not to be denied. And if it be allowed, does it not give us moſt exalted ideas of the divine Majeſty? Is it ſo, that in every part of God's dominion, where we can be placed, we are ſurrounded by Angels; and that this innumerable company is continually occupied in carrying on the purpoſes of his adminiſtration? Then how unſpeakably great and glorious muſt He be! Will it not, alſo, fix a ſerious and uſeful impreſſion upon our minds, to be aſſured that theſe holy beings are about our path, watch over us, intereſt themſelves in our happineſs, and narrowly inſpect our conduct? If only the veil of fleſh and blood were removed, we ſhould perceive ourſelves in the midſt of many witneſſes. We know not, how much we are indebted to their kind and active exertions in our favour. But what do they obſerve in our deportment? Are we not guilty of thoſe actions before them, from which we ſhould be deterred by the preſence of any human creature? Are

* 2 Kings xix. 35. † Acts xii. 23.

we not, then, afraid, left, while they atteſt our folly and perverſeneſs, they ſhould be commanded to relinquiſh their charge?

We proceed to conſider

II. What attention they pay to the concerns of our ſalvation. Having preſerved their original purity, they ſtand in no need of a Redeemer: yet, with a generous, diſintereſted affection, they rejoice in the grace, which is extended to us. It ſhould ſeem, that the great plan, exhibited in the Goſpel, is the ſubject of their holy meditations, and excites their praiſe and wonder. They do not treat it with contempt, as many of thoſe evidently do, whoſe everlaſting ſtate depends upon it. Probably, they underſtand much of its glory, while they ſtoop down with eager ſolicitude to diſcover more. Though the luſtre, which attracts their notice, prevents by its radiance their cloſer inſpection, and compels them to confeſs, that it "paſſeth knowledge," yet they ſtill long for a fuller revelation of the divine counſel: "they deſire to look into the things," which are thus hidden from the view by their own incomprehenſible excellence *.

They could not but feel aſtoniſhment, when firſt informed, that the exalted Perſonage, who is their Lord and God, was about to aſſume our nature, and become a ſuffering inhabitant of the earth, that he might reſcue us from deſtruction. Even to the preſent hour they are unable to fathom this deep myſtery. But they admire the divine perfections of wiſdom, power, love, truth, and holineſs, as diſplayed in the

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

croſs

cross of Christ: and, perhaps, in no other instance have they seen so much of the character of Jehovah. Accordingly, it is declared to be one part of the grand design, "that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God *.

"When the fulness of the time was come," that the Saviour should appear, they were employed in various ways. They announced his incarnation to Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph †, proclaimed "the good tidings" of his nativity to the shepherds, and then, in a numerous company, praised God "for his unspeakable gift ‡." They cried aloud, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Then indeed was "Jesus seen of Angels §:" they contemplated the incarnate God with fixed attention and holy admiration, and were required to acknowledge his divine character, by rendering him unfeigned homage. When the Father bringeth the First-begotten into the world, he saith, "Let all the Angels of God worship him ‖."

During the whole of the Redeemer's abode on earth, even through his deepest humiliation, they waited upon him as their Lord. After his severe conflict in the wilderness, "Behold, Angels came, and ministered unto him ┼." When he was ready to faint by means of the agony and bloody sweat, which he endured in the garden of Gethsemane, "there appeared an Angel unto him from heaven

* Eph. iii. 10. † Matt. i. and Luke i. ‡ Luke ii. 8—14.
§ 1 Tim. iii. 16. ‖ Heb. i. 6. ┼ Matt. iv. 11.

strengthening

ſtrengthening him *." It was one of this illuſtrious ſociety, who rolled away the ſtone, that his diſciples might be permitted to examine his ſepulchre; and it ſhould ſeem, that ſeveral of theſe holy beings were employed in atteſting his reſurrection †. Upon his aſcenſion into heaven, two of them in ſhining forms preſented themſelves to his Apoſtles, and predicted their Lord's triumphant return at the laſt day ‡: and when he, in human nature, entered into glory, amidſt the acclamations of all his numerous hoſt, his pre-eminence over them was declared; "Angels, and authorities, and powers being made ſubject unto him §."

As the ſervants of Jeſus, they not only join in his praiſes with the Church above, but promote the purpoſes of his mercy in the Church below, by ways which we pretend not to explain. They are not ſent forth to preach the Goſpel; this honour being reſerved for ſinners, who feel their own need of that ſalvation, which they propoſe, and are more likely to ſympathize with their hearers in all the various circumſtances of diſtreſs and temptation. But theſe bleſſed ſpirits attend our religious aſſemblies, as witneſſes of our devotions, and with a peculiar eagerneſs of deſire for the ſucceſs of the miniſtry ‖. "There is joy in the preſence of the Angels of God over one ſinner that repenteth ⸸;" as if every new convert was an addition to their happineſs. Whilſt they praiſe God for ſuch an inſtance of his goodneſs, they exult

* Lu. xxii. 43. † Matt. xxviii. 2—7. Mar. xvi. 5—8. Lu. xxiv. 4—7. John xx. 12. ‡ Acts i. 10, 11. § 1 Pet. iii. 22. ‖ 1 Cor. xi. 10. Eccleſ. v. 6. ⸸ Lu. xv. 10.

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in the victory obtained over the powers of darkness, and in the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. They receive the young believer under their care, being commissioned to watch over him for his protection and comfort. Thus we are assured, with respect to the weakest and most inconsiderable members of the Church, "Their Angels," or those who are deputed to be their guardians, are no less than the exalted spirits, who stand near the throne and "always behold the face of God in heaven *." None of them are too great to be exempted from these services; "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation †?"

Soon they will deliver up their charge, and conduct the souls of those, who were committed to them, "through the valley of the shadow of death" to their glorious and blest abode. Thus when Lazarus died, he "was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom ‡." Believers, then, on their dismission from the body, are attended by these holy beings, and enter into a state of immediate and delightful intercourse with them; so that they will join together, in one company, to ascribe "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever §."

We profess to admire the excellency of this celestial host; but should we not, also, cultivate a similar disposition? While they, who are so eminent in wisdom, are giving all serious regard to the

* Matt. xviii. 10. † Heb. i. 14. ‡ Lu. xvi. 22. § Rev. v. 13.

work of redemption, ſhall WE think it a mark of good ſenſe and ſuperior underſtanding to turn from the conſideration of it with diſdain? Is it beneath us to imitate their example, and "deſire to look into" the ſame important ſubject? We would, therefore, aſk our readers, Do you, like the Angels, contemplate the incarnate God and Saviour with aſtoniſhment and fervour of affection, and bow before him with deepeſt reverence and adoration? Do you adopt their rapturous anthems, and praiſe God for the birth of his Son? How can you be unconcerned about this amazing tranſaction, with which the honour of God and the ſalvation both of yourſelves and others is immediately connected? Do you feel a generous ſolicitude for the ſouls of your fellow creatures, and rejoice "over one ſinner that repenteth?" Rather, have you not, on ſuch an occaſion, ſhewn a malignant diſpleaſure, and thrown out virulent reproaches? Have you not exerted your influence to obſtruct the progreſs of the Goſpel? While you poſſeſs ſuch tempers, theſe immaculate ſpirits cannot look upon you with favourable regard, however you may be eſteemed and applauded by your gay and diſſolute companions. O be perſuaded to pay a deference to the opinion and example of thoſe, whoſe wiſdom and goodneſs ſtand unimpeached, and unite with them in the moſt vigorous efforts to do the will of God, and promote his glory!

In our attention to the character of Angels, it will be proper to examine

III. What concern they bear in the ſolemn proceedings

ceedings of the laſt day. The grand ſcheme of redemption being completed, the Saviour will appear as the ſupreme and univerſal Judge, and by his irrevocable ſentence declare the everlaſting ſtate of the whole human race. How important the deciſion!

The ſcriptures do not repreſent theſe holy beings, as called to account for their conduct before the tribunal of Chriſt; but it ſhould ſeem, that they will be employed for various purpoſes at his advent. When he ſhall deſcend from heaven, they will attend him as his faithful ſervants, and grace his triumph. "The Son of man ſhall come in his glory, with ten thouſand of his ſaints, and all the holy Angels with him*:" ſo that heaven ſhall pour forth its inhabitants to diſplay the majeſty of the King and execute his orders. They ſhall give the ſummons for all mankind to ſtand at his bar. "The voice of the Archangel," announcing his approach, ſhall be particularly diſtinguiſhed on that awful occaſion†. "And he ſhall ſend his Angels with a great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other‡." The tremendous ſound will penetrate the deepeſt receſſes of the grave; and each individual of Adam's poſterity muſt obey the call.

All nations being now aſſembled before the Judge, and the different characters ſeparated, arraigned, and tried, "every man's work ſhall be made manifeſt," and every ſecret thing be brought forth for public inſpec-

* Matt. xxv. 31. Jude 14. † 1 Theſſ. iv. 16. ‡ Matt. xxiv. 31.

 tion.

tion *. Then ſhall theſe illuſtrious ſpirits, who ſurround the throne, not only ſtand as witneſſes, but even be appealed to for the equity of the ſolemn proceedings. This, at leaſt, ſeems to be implied in our Lord's declarations: "Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him ſhall the Son of man alſo confeſs before the Angels of God: but he that denieth me before men, ſhall be denied before the Angels of God †." They, likewiſe, will be commiſſioned to carry the deciſive ſentence into immediate execution. They are "the reapers," to whom the Lord of the harveſt will ſay, "Gather ye together firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn ‡." When, therefore, the Judge ſhall pronounce, "Come, ye bleſſed," and, "Depart from me, ye curſed §;" they, acknowledging and approving the juſt award, will conduct the righteous with great triumph to their manſions of bliſs and glory, and thruſt down the impenitent, with ſhame and everlaſting contempt, into the fire prepared for the Devil and his apoſtate company.

Who among us can read or hear of theſe things with indifference? Let us not forget, how much we are intereſted in the tranſactions of that day. We muſt all obey the ſummons of the Archangel's trumpet, and ſtand before the great tribunal. But how ſhall we bear the ſtrict examination, when our actions and principles ſhall be ſifted, and exhibited to public view, before the inhabitants of heaven, as well

* 1 Cor. iii. 13. iv. 5. † Lu. xii. 8, 9. ‡ Matt. xiii. 30, 39. § xxv. 34, 41.

as

as thoſe of earth? Are there none, who will wiſh to hide their heads, or fly from the preſence of the Judge? But an eſcape or concealment will be impoſſible. The moſt ſtout-hearted ſinner muſt await his doom; nor can he reſiſt or retard the infliction of his puniſhment. When the tremendous ſentence ſhall be pronounced, "Caſt ye the unprofitable ſervant into outer darkneſs *," the word will be powerful and the execution inſtantaneous. No accuſation, however, ſhall prevail againſt thoſe, who are juſtified by the faith of Jeſus. They ſhall go into life eternal, attended by all the hoſt of heaven, before whom they ſhall receive the high diſtinctions of the crown of righteouſneſs and th palm of victory: they ſhall be clothed with white raiment, and even ſeated with the Saviour in his throne. Such honour will the ſaints of God obtain, in the preſence, and by the miniſtration, of Angels.

In relation to theſe bright ſpirits, it remains only that we obſerve,

IV. What will be their ſituation in the kingdom of glory for ever. We have already remarked, that they are admitted to view the full and unveiled ſplendour of the Deity, and, while they wait in readineſs to perform his pleaſure, are continually offering up the ſong and ſacrifice of praiſe. We preſume not to explain the nature of their worſhip: but ſome general account is given us by the prophet. Iſaiah tells us, that he "ſaw the Lord ſitting upon a throne, high and lifted up;" that "above it ſtood the Seraphims, and one cried unto another, and ſaid, Holy, holy, holy

* Matt. xxv. 30.

is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory *." Such, we conclude, will be their state and employment through eternity: for, as they are called "the elect Angels †," they will never be dispossessed of their present happiness and exaltation.

We know not, that any particular change will be made in their condition at the last judgment; but it is probable, that they will experience an increase of felicity. Being confirmed in their purity and obedience, and united as one family with all redeemed saints, they will join with one heart and voice in praising and adoring God and the Lamb. The Lord Jesus Christ is the centre of this union: in Him they meet, and are incorporated into the same society. Accordingly St. Paul declares, it was the grand purpose of God, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him ‡." The object of their worship is the same, and a perfect agreement in sentiment and affection will subsist between them. Yet a distinction must be made. The Angels, who never sinned, cannot be considered as the purchase of the Saviour, and are not indebted to his sacrifice and intercession for the honourable situation, in which they are placed. They are struck with the view of his grace and glory, and constrained to sing, with a rapturous admiration, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." But those of our fallen race, whom he hath ransomed from sin and hell, will feel their superior obligations, and endeavour to express their

* Isa. vi. 1—3. † 1 Tim. v. 21. ‡ Eph. i. 10.

gratitude

gratitude and affection, in strains peculiar to themselves; for they will add, "He hath redeemed us to God by his blood *." This, indeed, is a song, "which no man can learn," but those, "who follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth †."

The faithful disciples of Christ may look forwards with unspeakable delight to that time, when they shall join the blessed society above. Perhaps, you are now surrounded by those, who despise and blaspheme the God of heaven; but soon shall you be united to them, who love and serve him without weariness or imperfection. You carry about with you, for the present, an infirm, vile, corruptible body, and, what is more painful, a depraved mind; but after a few days you shall be rescued from this state of degradation and bondage, when you shall resemble the Angels themselves in purity, happiness, and glory ‡. Even here, indeed, you worship and obey the same Lord, and the thought may afford you some consolation, when you are ready to conclude that you are left alone, and that there are none to take your part. Thousands of these spotless beings stand round about you, approve your conduct, and are commissioned to minister to your relief. Could you draw aside the veil which conceals the invisible world, what a scene would be displayed! Enough to render you superior to all the insults and cruelties of an opposing world. Like Elisha, when compassed with threatening enemies, you would see these chariots of fire sent down from heaven in your defence; and, possessing your

* Rev. v. 8—13. † xiv. 3, 4. ‡ Matt. xxii.

ſouls in peace, you would exclaim with the prophet, "Fear not; for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them *."

But, while you rejoice in their friendſhip and protection, you ſhould propoſe their bright examples of goodneſs for your own imitation. At leaſt, you ſhould not be ſatisfied with any thing ſhort of their obedience. Your Lord himſelf has taught you to pray, that the will of God may be done on earth, "as it is in heaven." You are not to regulate your practice by the defective ſtandard of human righteouſneſs, but muſt preſs forwards to attainments, which may, in ſome meaſure, reſemble the holineſs of Angels. They ſerve God perfectly, without exception of one duty; conſtantly, without intermiſſion; and cheerfully, without compulſion; nay, with fervent love and ſupreme delight. This, alſo, you ſhould aſpire after; and therefore earneſtly covet and implore increaſing communications of that grace, by which you will finally be brought into a ſtate of complete conformity with them. But, on comparing yourſelves with the pattern here exhibited, are you not deeply aſhamed and humbled?

Thoſe pure and exalted creatures in every reſpect anſwer the end of their being. Many, alas! of our corrupt race, are not merely defective in righteouſneſs, but totally oppoſite to this character. Do we not live among thoſe, who are actuated by tempers and principles, as contrary to thoſe of Angels, as darkneſs to light? We, therefore, ſolemnly appeal

* 2 Kings vi. 15—17.

to

to them, and aſk, Of what ſort will be your ſociety hereafter? Diſpoſed as you now are, you cannot have fellowſhip with the hoſt of heaven, nor they with you. Their employment is what you will never reliſh: you deteſt and put away from you, what is their higheſt delight. It is not poſſible, that they ſhould accommodate themſelves to your depraved taſte; for this would involve an oppoſition to God and an excluſion from happineſs. Your proſpect is indeed tremendous. You muſt dwell with thoſe, whom you reſemble, and with whom you are confederate in rebellion againſt Jehovah. Is this what you can bear to think of? Yet moſt aſſuredly, you muſt have your portion with evil ſpirits, unleſs you be created anew in Chriſt Jeſus.

May the Lord God, in ſovereign mercy, pour out his ſanctifying influence upon all orders and ranks of men! May He form us to be a people for his name, and make us of one heart and mind with the Church above! So ſhall we underſtand and feel the meaning of thoſe exalted anthems, which we are taught to uſe. With ſincere and ardent devotion we ſhall cry aloud to the God of our ſalvation; "With Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name; evermore praiſing thee, and ſaying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hoſts; heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord moſt High *!" Amen.

* Communion Service.

EVIL SPIRITS.

CHAP. XIV.

Evil ſpirits, their exiſtence, fall, and excluſion from heaven—tempted our firſt parents—maintain large influence in the earth, among the impenitent—once were permitted to poſſeſs men's bodies—oppoſed the Saviour—ſtill reſiſt the progreſs of the Goſpel—aſſault believers—yet their agency does not extenuate our guilt—will ſoon be confounded—ſummoned to judgment—and doomed to eternal puniſhment.

AFTER the ſtrong proofs, which we have ſeen, of man's apoſtaſy from God, perhaps the queſtion may ariſe, Is this the only order of intelligent beings, who have revolted from their obedience? Or, where did ſin originate? The ſacred records have informed us of another ſyſtem of creatures, who were the firſt tranſgreſſors, and are the authors and abettors of that rebellion, which has prevailed in our own world. We proceed, therefore, to obſerve, that there are Devils in hell, as well as Angels in heaven. There is a numerous company of wicked ſpirits, who diſcover a blaſphemous contempt of God, and are continually endeavouring to defeat the purpoſes of his government. The contemplation of their wretched condition may excite many painful ſenſations; but the ſub-

ject ſeems properly to come under our plan, as being cloſely connected with ſcripture hiſtory, and it may be productive of ſolid advantage, if we conſider it with true ſeriouſneſs of mind.

Their influence in human affairs, and even their exiſtence have been denied. But, if we allow the inſpiration of the Bible, we ought implicitly to receive its teſtimony in every particular. We attempt to invalidate its authority, if we think ourſelves at liberty to reject thoſe declarations, however clear and expreſs, which cannot be accommodated to our ſyſtems or wiſhes. Now, no account can be delivered in plainer terms, none more repeatedly aſſerted and confirmed, than that which is given of the fallen angels. It is no good objection to this hiſtory, that it does not contain ſo full and minute a relation, as our curioſity might deſire: for it never was deſigned, that we ſhould underſtand every thing, or obtain perfect ſatiſfaction in our ſpeculative enquiries. But, if we admit what the ſcriptures have revealed concerning the ſtate, character, and employment of evil ſpirits, we ſhall have a conſiſtent explanation of what we obſerve both in ourſelves and others. A ſerious attention to the world around us, and to the wild and irregular workings, of which we cannot but be conſcious in our own minds, would incline us to believe, even if we had no Bible, that we are ſubject to a foreign influence of a malignant kind. Univerſal experience verifies what the inſpired volume has affirmed. May we be led to admire and adore that grace, which not only reſtrains the malice of theſe unholy beings, but

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is effectual to rescue us from their power! May our great Deliverer break the bonds, by which many of our sinful race are still enslaved, and give them to know, that his service is the most perfect freedom!

In the history of wicked spirits we must consider

I. Their fall. A total and lamentable change has taken place both in their situation and disposition. Originally they were possessed of dignity, purity, and happiness, which they have now entirely lost. They were ranked amongst the Angels in heaven, and equal to them in excellency and glory; but they "kept not their first estate:" renouncing their obedience to God, they "left their own habitation," being driven out with shame and confusion *. They are called "principalities and powers," and are said to have been "in high places †;" which shews that they were endued with eminent faculties, and distinguished among the superior orders of the celestial Hierarchy. But their exaltation was no preservative: they have suffered a tremendous degradation. A numerous company, combined under one leader, who is named Satan or Beelzebub, joined in rebellion against Jehovah. We do not enquire into the particular nature and circumstances of their transgression. But it should seem, that they were instigated by ambition, or a vain desire of knowledge or preeminence beyond the divine appointment: for, when St. Paul speaks of one "lifted up with pride," he describes him as "falling into the condemnation of the Devil ‡." It is sufficient, however, to say, that they sinned.

* Jude 6. † Eph. vi. 12. ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

Having,

Having, then, caſt off their allegiance to God, they could no longer aſſociate with thoſe, whoſe whole delight is to do his will, and worſhip at his feet. Having loſt their holineſs, they could not retain their felicity; for miſery is the neceſſary conſequence of depravity and guilt. Every good principle was baniſhed, every vile affection admitted: they became a torment to themſelves. But their wretchedneſs is not to be conſidered merely as the unavoidable effect of their apoſtaſy: it is the righteous infliction of their incenſed Sovereign. His authority being deſpiſed, his anger was provoked, and his juſtice armed with terrors againſt them. He could not ſuffer them to remain in heaven, with a ſpirit of diſobedience or independence. He appointed them a new place, and conſigned them to a ſtate of extreme and endleſs puniſhment in hell, where they are exhibited as an example of the malignant nature and deſtructive tendency of ſin. How aſtoniſhing a change was this! Let us learn from it to revere the holineſs of God, who "cannot look on iniquity," and the ſtrictneſs of his government, which guards his law by ſo tremendous a penalty as "the vengeance of eternal fire." "Who ſhall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?" Thou art, indeed, "a conſuming fire" to all, who preſume to reſiſt thy power. While we hear of thine awful diſpenſations towards the rebellious angels, "our fleſh trembleth for fear of thee, and we are afraid of thy judgments *."

* Pſal. cxix. 120.

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In conſidering the caſe of theſe apoſtate creatures, we muſt proceed to remark .

II. Their preſent ſituation and employment. It was not poſſible that by any exertions they ſhould recover their former abode and purity, and we apprehend that they have never really wiſhed it. They could not deliver themſelves from torment, or return to their former allegiance. They retain an invariable, rooted enmity againſt God; and it ſhould ſeem, that ever ſince their fall they have been attempting to overturn or obſtruct his government. Such, evidently, appeared to be their diſpoſition at the creation of our world. Perhaps, the happineſs of our firſt parents excited their envy. Certain it is, that upon them they fixed their malicious eyes, and conſulted how to caſt them down from their eminence, and draw them into the ſame ſtate of diſobedience and miſery with themſelves. They contrived a temptation, which, through the ſubtle management of their grand leader, ſucceeded. He took the opportunity of ſpreading the ſnare before Eve, when ſhe was alone. He ſolicited her compliance, by propoſing a pleaſant gratification of appetite, and a more exalted condition. She liſtened to his lies, which were couched in fair ſpeeches: ſhe conſented, and then prevailed upon her huſband alſo to tranſgreſs.

Thus the ſtandard of rebellion was erected upon the earth; its inhabitants were ſeduced, and joined in confederacy with the infernal hoſt. Thoſe wicked ſpirits, probably, triumphed in that calamitous event, as if they had prevailed againſt Jehovah, and repreſented him as a weak and cruel tyrant, who could

not

not ſecure his own dominion, or preſerve the affection of his ſubjects. The very end of our creation ſeemed to be defeated; and, had not God in ſovereign mercy interpoſed to repair the breach, the whole human race muſt have remained for ever alienated from him, and expoſed to his fierce indignation.

We perceive, by what tempers theſe unholy beings are influenced. A proud oppoſition to God, an hatred of all goodneſs, aſſiduity and zeal in promoting evil, falſhood, and treachery, an envious diſguſt at the happineſs or excellence of others, and a deſire to ſpread ſin and miſery to the greateſt poſſible extent,—theſe are ſome of the leading principles, which mark the character of Satan and his aſſociates. "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, becauſe there is no truth in him. When he ſpeaketh a lie, he ſpeaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it*." "The devil ſinneth from the beginning†:" He was the original trangreſſor, and has ever ſince been practiſing iniquity with unceaſing activity and vigour. This is "our adverſary," whom we are required to "reſiſt, ſteadfaſt in the faith," "becauſe, as a roaring lion, he walketh about, ſeeking whom he may devour‡." All his apoſtate company are of like deſcription. They are called "ſpiritual wickedneſs§," or wicked ſpirits: they are themſelves moſt corrupt and abominable, and unwearied in their endeavours to render others equally depraved.

Their ſtratagems, alas! have been fatally ſucceſsful

* John viii. 44. † 1 John iii. 8. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.
§ Eph. vi. [illegible].

among

among the human race. For which reason, it should seem, Satan is styled "the prince" and "the god of this world *." He cannot possess any rightful authority; yet he meets with general submission, though he is a base usurper. We speak of him as the representative of all the fallen spirits, and ascribe to him whatever they effect or attempt, since he directs their movements. Let us examine, what influence he has exercised, and what mischief he has produced among the posterity of Adam. The account may be offensive to our pride; but, without wishing to conceal or palliate the truth, we must give a faithful representation of the case.

In the old testament Satan was "the lying spirit," by whom the false prophets were instigated †; and in the new, those preachers, who pervert right doctrine, are said to be his ministers ‡. Nay, it is expressly declared, that all those, who like him are actuated by pride, envy, malice, or deceit, are his children, and "will do the lusts of their father §." He it was, who tempted Judas to sell and betray the Saviour, and, having taken full possession of the perfidious wretch, deserted him not, till he had accomplished his utter destruction of body and soul ||. The same infernal agent "filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Ghost ⊥:" and wherever any persons reject salvation, the effect is in some measure to be ascribed to Satan's malignant interference. He "hath blinded the minds

* John xvi. 11. 2 Cor. iv. . † 1 Kings xxii. 21—23.
‡ 2 Cor. xi. 15. § John viii. 44. || John xiii. 2, 27.
⊥ Acts v. 3.

of

of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them *." He is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience †." Sinners may not be aware whom they serve, and under whose instigation they act. But from the scriptures we learn, that Satan maintains dominion over them, and that, however they may seem to differ from each other, they all follow his guidance, and bear his image. He stirs up Antichrist to oppose or pervert the purity of the Gospel ‡; and "takes captive at his will" those who resist the truth §. We readily allow, perhaps, that such atrocious offenders as "Cain, who slew his brother," may be "of that wicked one;" but it is equally certain, that "he that committeth sin," though it be in a less scandalous way, "is of the devil ||." Such declarations should excite us to enquire with real earnestness, "To whom do we yield ourselves servants to obey?"

Various are the devices, by which our spiritual adversary prevails. He tempts men to the practice of evil, by exhibiting to their view a flattering prospect of its pleasure, and concealing the danger. He suggests to them, as he did to our first parents, "Ye shall not surely die ‡;" and it seems to be the masterpiece of his subtlety, to induce them to believe that there is no future punishment. Thus he endeavours to lull them asleep and stupify their consciences, not

* 2 Cor. iv. 4. † Eph. ii. 2. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 9.
§ 2 Tim. ii. 26. || 1 John iii. 8, 12. ‡ Gen. iii. 4.

from a benevolent deſire of rendering them happy; but that he may more effectually ſecure their obedience to himſelf, and accompliſh their final deſtruction. He is "the ſtrong man," who gains poſſeſſion of the ſinner's heart, and there being "armed keepeth his palace; and his goods are in peace *."

Yet his malignity has appeared in other forms. At the time of our Lord's incarnation, he was permitted, for ſpecial reaſons, to exerciſe a peculiar power over the bodies of many perſons, who were, in conſequence, miſerably afflicted and tormented. In their diſtreſsful caſes we perceive, that he ſtudies to torture and deſtroy by every poſſible method. It has been thought, that thoſe, who by Apoſtolical cenſures were "delivered unto Satan," ſuffered in the ſame way; and that the evil ſpirit, as the executioner of divine juſtice, inflicted upon them certain diſeaſes, or excruciating pains †. But, be that as it may, ſuch is his malice, that, if he were left without reſtraint to gratify his own miſchievous diſpoſition, we ſhould no longer experience a moment's eaſe, or enjoy our faculties either of body or mind: the earth would be a reſemblance of hell. O how great are our obligations to our Almighty Preſerver!

It becomes us, in an eſpecial manner, to adore the God of all grace, who propoſes in the Goſpel complete and final deliverance from our infernal adverſary. The Lord Jeſus Chriſt has lifted up a ſtandard againſt him, and undertakes for all believers to defeat his purpoſes. He has interpoſed to ranſom them by

* Luke xi. 21. † 1 Cor. v. 5. 1 Tim. i. 20.

the

the might of his Spirit, and at the expenſe of his own precious blood. The merciful deſign was revealed to our firſt parents, immediately after their revolt, when it was declared, that the Seed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head *.. Satan is unwilling to renounce the dominion, which he has uſurped, and with violence oppoſes the intentions of the Redeemer. There are, therefore, two contending parties: a ſharp conflict has been maintained from the beginning; and it is not poſſible, that any reconciliation between them ſhould be effected. This circumſtance exhibits another feature in the character of the fiend: he reſiſts the Saviour, and labours with the utmoſt vigour to prevent or obſtruct the influence of his grace. O let us be afraid of bearing any the moſt diſtant reſemblance to ſuch a horrid diſpoſition!"

During our Lord's abode on earth, he endured extreme diſtreſs from the violent aſſaults of this antagoniſt. Forty days he was haraſſed by his temptations in the wilderneſs: and then the devil, when vanquiſhed and obliged to retire, departed only "for a ſeaſon †." Probably, the attack was renewed, though without ſucceſs. Jeſus obſerved to his enemies, near the cloſe of his life, "This is your hour, and the power of darkneſs ‡:" whence it ſhould ſeem, that Satan was then permitted to make his fierceſt onſet, and to try what his malice could do. But, with a reference to that onſet, the Saviour exclaimed in a delightful exultation, "The prince of this world cometh,

* Gen. iii. 15. † Luke iv. 13. ‡ xxii. 53.

and hath nothing in me *." The foe, indeed, so far prevailed, as to procure the crucifixion, and to enjoy a temporary triumph in the completion of his wishes; but that event proved the ruin of his own kingdom. We are encouraged to rejoice, that our victorious Redeemer "through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil †."

Consistently with his character as "the enemy of all righteousness," Satan has uniformly endeavoured to obstruct the Gospel. This being the most effectual instrument for "the pulling down of his strong holds," and the emancipation of his captives, he may be expected to oppose it with all his strength and subtlety. Wherever, therefore, the word of grace and salvation is preached, he watches for an opportunity to prevent its success. Like a bird of the air, he hovers about the place in which the good seed is sown, and takes it out of men's hearts, "lest they should believe and be saved ‡." He is the enemy, which soweth tares in the field with a view to defeat the designs of its proprietor §. If we are favoured with an evangelical ministry, the consideration of such a malicious intruder should awaken a holy circumspection and fear. As it is his plan to keep us in ignorance and unbelief, he will endeavour to cast reproach upon the truth, and fill our minds with prejudice. Let us suspect and guard against his influence. The most violent persecutors of the Church are his instruments: he assists them in the contrivance and execution of their schemes. Even the

* John xiv. 30. † Heb. ii. 14. ‡ Luke viii. 12.
§ Matt. xiii. 37—39.

imprisonment of the saints is ascribed to him, because it is effected under his instigation *. He is active, likewise, in promoting false doctrines and divisions among Christians, as the probable means of obstructing the work of God. How solicitous should we be, lest through our folly or perverseness "he get an advantage of us!" We ought to be constantly aware "of his devices †."

Those, who are rescued from his dominion, and devoted to the service of Christ, must look for a severe attack, since the tyrant will not quietly resign his prey. Young converts generally experience a peculiar degree of his malice. He seems to practise upon them every method of temptation, by which he may shake their religious principles, and subject them again to his own authority. When these fail, and they, who were once his willing captives, are evidently brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, then indeed the power of the usurper is broken, but his enmity remains the same. He will continually endeavour to disturb the peace of believers, and distress those whom he cannot destroy. This malignant influence alone will account for the strange commotions, which are excited in their minds. Difficulties, doubts, and fears are suggested, by which their faith is staggered; and with a kind of violent importunity they are solicited to act in opposition to their better judgment and desires. Such is the warfare, which they must be prepared to maintain through life. Satan is a restless opponent; when one scheme fails, he will try

* Rev. ii. 10. † 2 Cor. ii. 11.

the effect of another. He is constantly aiming to harass and seduce the servants of the Lord by some new device, and with every fresh circumstance he varies his mode of attack.

He it was, who tempted David to transgress, probably through motives of ambition, by numbering the people *. By his malevolent interference, Job, that eminent saint of God, was reduced to a state of extreme distress, confusion, and horror. When "Joshua the high priest," as the representative of the Church, "stood before the Angel of the Lord," pleading for acceptance, "Satan stood at his right hand to resist him †." This is a striking picture of our adversary's employment: for he is "the accuser of our brethren, who accuseth them before our God day and night ‡." The Apostles of Christ were once induced to forsake their Lord; but he himself accounted for that strange event, when he said, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat §." St. Paul was perplexed and almost overwhelmed by a severe affliction, which he calls "a thorn in the flesh;" but the sharpness of the trial was owing to the influence of this wicked spirit: it was "the messenger of Satan to buffet him ‖." After such instances, who shall expect to escape an attack? Every believer is called to be a soldier, and expressly required to be prepared for the combat, by "putting on the whole armour of God," in order "to stand against the wiles of the devil ⟊." It is spoken of as

* 1 Chron. xxi. 1. † Zech. iii. 1. ‡ Rev. xii. 10.
§ Luke xxii. 31. ‖ 2 Cor. xii. 7. ⟊ Eph. vi. 11.

probable

probable that the foe may ſhoot his "fiery darts" into the ſoul, whilſt an aſſurance is given, that "the ſhield of faith" will quench them *. There is therefore only one method of ſafety; "Reſiſt the devil, and he will flee from you †."

It ſhould be remembered, that, notwithſtanding the power of the tempter, our moral liberty is not ſo impaired, as to render us in any degree the leſs accountable for our actions. He may propoſe the commiſſion of ſin, and ſolicit our compliance; but he cannot ſucceed, except by our own voluntary conſent. Yet, alas! how prone we are to yield to his ſuggeſtions! Such is the depravity of our nature, that it is always ready to ſecond his attempts; and therefore his aſcendancy over us will not furniſh us with an excuſe; nay rather, it ſhews the greatneſs of our guilt. We are his willing vaſſals; and his ſervice, though moſt oppreſſive, is what we chooſe. We muſt blame him, but we cannot acquit ourſelves. Let us lie down aſhamed, and earneſtly deprecate that wrath, which we have deſerved.

In attending to the ſcriptural declarations concerning apoſtate ſpirits, we have only to remark further

III. Their future doom. They are already conſigned to a ſtate of extreme puniſhment, as the due reward of their tranſgreſſion, without hope of deliverance. Their character and ſituation are fixed and determined for ever. A Saviour is provided for us, but not for them: and yet there was nothing in our caſe, any more than in their's, which could encourage

* Eph. vi. 16. † James iv. 7.

an expectation of forgivenefs. Criminals can have no claim to favour. Here, then, we behold the aftonifhing grace and diftinguifhing love of our Redeemer. They are dealt with in the way of ftrict juftice, and cannot complain of fuffering wrongfully. But rich mercy is difplayed towards our fpecies. The Lord Jefus "took not on him the nature of angels," he did not interpofe for the refcue of thofe miferable beings, who were once angels in heaven; "but he took on him the feed of Abraham," pledging himfelf for the falvation of all thofe of the human race, who fhould partake of that Patriarch's faith *.

The prefent fyftem exhibits a conflict between the evil fpirits and our exalted Redeemer: but it is drawing to a clofe, and the final iffue will be for his glory and their everlafting confufion. In the profpect of this complete victory, Jefus at one time exclaimed, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven †;" and at another, "Now fhall the prince of this world be caft out ‡." St. Paul alfo thus encourages believers to triumph on the fame account, "The God of peace fhall bruife Satan under your feet fhortly §." The malignant fiend will be permitted to maintain his influence among men a little longer. But foon he fhall be bound for a thoufand years ‖, and during that period confined to his own place, without exercifing the deftructive power upon earth, which he now poffeffes. His dominion fhall be fubdued, and "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our

* Heb. ii. 16. † Luke x. 18. ‡ John xii. 31.
§ Rom. xvi. 20. ‖ Rev. xx. 2.

Lord

Lord and of his Chriſt *." Afterwards, he ſhall be ſuffered to regain his aſcendancy for a ſhort ſeaſon, in which, as it ſhould ſeem, iniquity will prevail more generally than it has ever done †. But "the end of all things" will immediately ſucceed, and exhibit a tremendous ſcene.

Satan and his vile aſſociates will be ſummoned to the tribunal of Chriſt, and examined in the laſt judgment. However haughty and unwilling, they muſt bend their necks before the injured majeſty of God, and the malignity of their characters and the juſtice of their puniſhment will be publicly evinced. They are now "reſerved in everlaſting chains under darkneſs," and there can be no poſſibility of eſcape: but they will be brought forth "to the judgment of the great day ‡," that their conduct may be ſubmitted to the inſpection of the aſſembled univerſe. The horrid ſtratagems, by which they deceive the world and haraſs the Church of God, will then be unfolded, and greatly aggravate their condemnation. Believers, who are now the object of their malice, will triumph in their deſtruction; being admitted to preſide, as the aſſeſſors of Chriſt, in that ſolemn trial. They will approve, rejoice in, and in ſome ſenſe paſs the ſentence. "Know ye not," ſaid St. Paul, "that we ſhall judge angels § ?"

The book of judgment being cloſed, theſe apoſtate ſpirits will be "caſt into the lake of fire and brimſtone ‖," where their miſery will ſurpaſs our utmoſt conceptions, and whence there can be no releaſe.

* Rev. xi. 15. † xx. 7, &c. ‡ Jude 6.
§ 1 Cor. vi. 3. ‖ Rev. xx. 10.

Impenitent

Impenitent ſinners, alſo, ſhall have their portion with them. Though the fire was "prepared for the Devil and his angels *," becauſe they were the original tranſgreſſors, yet there ſhall they all, the deceived and the deceiver, in one horrible company, "be tormented day and night for ever and ever." This torment will in no reſpect tend to change or ſoften their obdurate minds. They will retain their hatred of God, "blaſpheme his name, and not repent, to give him glory †." The juſtice of God, therefore, will not remove or mitigate the puniſhment throughout eternity. It is declared in the moſt expreſs terms, of which language is capable, that it ſhall be "everlaſting." And who ſhall preſume to object, or preſcribe to God the proper meaſures of his government, as if we were more competent to decide, what his own righteous perfections may demand?

The awful ſubject naturally gives riſe to various reflections.

1. Let "the redeemed of the Lord" rejoice and triumph in their great Deliverer. While you contemplate the character and ſtate of the infernal hoſt, you cannot but be deeply impreſſed with your immenſe obligations. Are you not conſtrained to cry out, with devout admiration of your diſtinguiſhed mercies, "Behold, what hath God wrought?" How much has Jeſus done; how much has he pledged himſelf to accompliſh, in your behalf! Already, you are "delivered from the power of darkneſs ‡," and "have

* Matt. xxv. 41. † Rev. xvi. 9. ‡ Col. i. 13.

overcome the wicked one *." But for the present, you may expect to feel very painful attacks from your malicious foe, though you shall not fall by his hands. His purposes against you shall finally be baffled, and even rendered subservient to your spiritual and eternal welfare. Only remember, whence all your strength is to be derived: you will "overcome him by the blood of the Lamb †." To your faith you must likewise add a diligent attention to duty. You are required to wrestle and fight, to watch and pray: and this should be your daily, your unceasing employment. You have ratified the solemn vow, that you will "renounce the Devil and all his works ‡:" never, then, dare to think of returning to his infamous service. Lift up your supplication to the God of all grace, that He may "deliver you from evil," from the wicked one §, "from his crafts and assaults," and "finally beat down Satan under your feet ||."

2. Let penitents, who feel their own weakness, and dread the power of these spiritual enemies, be encouraged. We allow, that there would be just cause for fear and despondency, if there were none to administer support. But the Lord hath said, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty ✝." We refer you to Jesus, who can dispossess "the strong man, and take from him all his armour, wherein he trusted **." O fly to this Saviour, and entreat his gracious assistance and protection! "Surely, He shall deliver thee from

* 1 John ii. 13. † Rev. xii. 11. ‡ Catechism.
§ Lord's Prayer. || Litany. ✝ Psalm lxxxix. 19.
** Luke xi. 22.

the ſnare of the fowler:—He ſhall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings ſhalt thou truſt: his truth ſhall be thy ſhield and buckler *." The horrid temptations, by which you are aſſaulted, and which excite diſtreſſing apprehenſions in your minds, are a favourable ſign. We conclude, from the violence of your adverſary, that you are reſcued from his dominion; for, if you were ſtill held in ſubjection, he would not alarm, but quiet your fears, and lull your conſciences aſleep. Perſiſt, then, in a determined oppoſition to the prince of darkneſs, and indulge the pleaſing hope, that Jeſus has broken the yoke of your oppreſſor, and will ſhortly give you complete deliverance.

3. Let careleſs ſinners be perſuaded to conſider, whoſe ſervants they are, and how their ſchemes of iniquity muſt terminate. It appears from the ſcripture account, however unwilling you may be to acknowledge it, that, while you are alienated from God, you are in ſubjection to Satan. You yield a ready compliance to the propoſals of that evil ſpirit; you act as his confederates, under his influence, and are conformed to his likeneſs. And does he not excite in your hearts ſuch tempers and affections, as render you wretched in yourſelves, and miſchievous to ſociety? Where, then, can you expect your final portion? "If God ſpared not the angels that ſinned, but caſt them down to hell †," is it to be imagined, that he will ſpare you, who deſpiſe and reject that mercy, which was never offered to them? You "count the

* Pſal. xci. 3, 4. † 2 Pet. ii. 4.

blood

blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace *:" but this is a degree of iniquity, with which they are not chargeable. What can equal the heinousness of your guilt? "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation †?" O be persuaded, while opportunity is allowed you, to "flee from the wrath to come!"

* Heb. x. 29. † ii. 3.

CONCLUSION.

CHAP. XV.

Self-examination recommended, as a proper improvement of "Scripture Characters."—Enquiries proposed: Are we among the saints, or the impenitent?—What is our state, conduct, and principles?—Are we "in the faith," and conformed to Jesus Christ, by virtue of a spiritual union with him?

HAVING finished our plan of deducing practical reflections from scripture examples, we may now close the subject by calling upon every reader to enquire, whether he has made a suitable improvement. Religion does not consist in curious speculations: it is a personal concern. We ought not, therefore, to be satisfied with collecting or analyzing the historical accounts, recorded in the sacred volume, or deciding upon the different people, whose cases have passed in review before us: we should seriously consider, what is our own spiritual state, and under what description we are to be classed. As the knowledge of ourselves is of far greater consequence than any other, we should direct all our studies to the attainment of that important object. How forcible, and how exactly adapted to our purpose, is the exhortation of the Apostle! "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove

prove your own ſelves: know ye not your own ſelves, how that Jeſus Chriſt is in you, except ye be reprobates * ?" Let us attend to this ſolemn counſel, and pray that He, "unto whom all hearts be open, all deſires known, and from whom no ſecrets are hid †," may ſearch and try us, deliver us from all hypocriſy, "and lead us in the way everlaſting."

It ſeems to have been the deſign of God, in allotting ſo large a portion of his word to the deſcription of various characters, to fix our regard upon ourſelves; and, without ſuch a particular application, it is not probable, that we ſhall reap any ſolid advantage from ſcripture hiſtory. While we are forming an opinion concerning the celebrated names of antiquity, let each one aſk, What am I to be accounted of? "Enoch had this teſtimony, that he pleaſed God ‡;" but do I poſſeſs any evidence of a ſimilar kind? I read that "Abraham was called the friend of God §:" but am I a child of Abraham? Moſes is repreſented as peculiarly eminent for his meekneſs of ſpirit: am not I carried away by the influence of pride, envy, and revenge? While I behold the holy life of Jeſus, the Son of God, is not the tenour of my conduct totally oppoſite? Though I perceive and approve the zeal, courage, and aſſiduity of his Apoſtles, am not I deſtitute of fervent love to his name, and concern for his glory, being indolent, fearful, and unbelieving?

If we purſue theſe enquiries through the ſcriptures, to what concluſion will they lead us? But the ſcru-

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. † Communion Service. ‡ Heb. xi. 5. § James ii. 23.

tiny

tiny propoſed is unpleaſant; and moſt perſons ſtart back from it, as conſcious of a defect, and aware that their accounts are bad. We apprehend that many ſtudy the ſacred writings, merely to gratify their curioſity in ſpeculating upon the various characters there exhibited, and indulge a proud, cenſorious diſpoſition in paſſing ſentence upon them, while they are averſe to a ſerious examination of their own hearts. Are we, then, at liberty to neglect the repeated injunctions given us, to "ſearch and try our ways *," and "prove our own work †?" Or, is the examination of no conſequence? If our ſtate be ſafe, it will have a happy tendency to fill our minds with confidence and joy: and on this ground it ſeems highly neceſſary, even to advanced Chriſtians, in order that they may be preſerved in peace, and encouraged to purſue the great object of their high calling with increaſing ardour. But, granting that we may poſſibly remain under the divine diſpleaſure, is it not peculiarly deſirable to be apprized of our danger? And are we not moſt likely, by a faithful enquiry, to diſcover our miſtakes, and the way of obtaining deliverance? In ſuch a caſe, ſurely, a ſupine indifference about the event is unpardonable, and muſt be expected to terminate in final deſtruction. The duty, here recommended, may appear difficult: but it ought not therefore to be declined. The chief difficulty to be removed is our diſinclination to every thing truly ſpiritual; and this circumſtance, ſo far from being an excuſe, furniſhes an additional reaſon for applying to the work in the moſt vigorous manner.

* Lamen. iii. 40. † Gal. vi. 4.

In

In the ſacred records we meet with different and oppoſite deſcriptions of men. Some were, confeſſedly, dear to God and eminent in holineſs, " a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The queſtion, then, ariſes, Do we reſemble them in temper, principle, and practice? If we compare ourſelves with Noah, Daniel, and Job, what likeneſs do we diſcover? Noah maintained his-integrity, and " walked with God," in a time of general depravity, when the earth was deluged with wickedneſs. The conduct of Daniel was ſo circumſpect and unblamable, that his malignant accuſers were conſtrained to ſay, " We ſhall not find any occaſion againſt him, except we find it concerning the law of his God:" and ſuch was the fervour of his piety, that he choſe rather to be caſt into a den of lions, than abandon his religion. Job was perplexed and almoſt overwhelmed with accumulated afflictions and violent temptations; but, in the midſt of his ſharpeſt diſtreſſes, he poſſeſſed a firm dependence on his God, and ſhewed an uncommon meaſure of meekneſs and ſubmiſſion. If we turn to the new teſtament, we behold the Apoſtles of the Lord, men who ſpent their ſtrength, and cheerfully hazarded their lives for the name of Jeſus: we follow them to their deaths, and ſee many ſealing the faith with their blood. Do we trace in any of theſe perſons a repreſentation of our own character? Are we actuated by ſimilar diſpoſitions? If otherwiſe; if we be in every reſpect totally oppoſite, how can we hope with them to inherit the promiſes?

The ſcriptures exhibit inſtances of thoſe, who were

the avowed adverſaries of the Lord, and lived in open diſobedience to his government. Cain is deſcribed as the enemy of true religion, the perſecutor, and at length the murderer, of his righteous brother. Pharaoh appears as a daring rebel, unhumbled under the moſt tremendous judgments, and hardening his heart in defiance of the God of heaven. Judas, the apoſtate diſciple of our Lord, is introduced as an example of the pernicious tendency of covetouſneſs, betraying his Maſter for a ſordid bribe. In Herod, the bloody king, who haraſſed the Church, we behold a proud and preſumptuous ſinner ſuddenly checked in his career, and ſtripped of his glory. While we mark their prevailing tempers, let us aſk, Are we not under the influence of the ſame vile affections, or of others equally deteſtable? Let us, then, not be ſatisfied with condemning them, but paſs an impartial judgment upon ourſelves; and, whereinſoever we have perverſely violated our duty, let us with ſhame and contrition acknowledge our own baſeneſs.

From theſe conſiderations we ſhall be led to enquire

1. What is our ſtate? There is an immenſe difference between the condition of a child of God, who is an heir of heaven, and that of an impenitent ſinner, obnoxious to eternal wrath. We ſhould examine, therefore, with which of theſe we may expect our final portion. We are all by nature depraved and prone to evil: are we renewed in righteouſneſs, through the efficacious, but myſterious, agency of the

Holy Spirit? We are tranſgreſſors of the divine law, and as ſuch liable to ſuffer everlaſting miſery. Is the ſentence cancelled? Or is there any plea, with which we can arreſt the arm of juſtice ready to take vengeance? Who ſhall interpoſe in our behalf? There is One, of high dignity, who "hath made peace through the blood of his croſs," obtained "reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlaſting righteouſneſs." Are we truly acquainted with his character? Or have we applied by faith for the bleſſings of his ſalvation? It were abſurd and preſumptuous to conclude favourably concerning our own ſtate, unleſs "we have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope ſet before us *." But if, through the merits of the Saviour, we poſſeſs an humble confidence towards God, we ſhould aſk further,

2, What is the tenour of our conduct? Is it ſuch, as to prove indiſputably the ſtrength and excellence of our religious principles? We ſhould judge according to our Lord's rule, "By their fruits ye ſhall know them †;" and therefore it will be proper to enquire, What do we bring forth? Do we produce the fruit of a good, or of a corrupt tree? Are we ſo impreſſed with the importance of eternal things, as evidently to "ſeek firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs?" Does it appear from our actions, that we "ſet the Lord always before us," and live as in his preſence? Do we ſhew, by an uniform, conſiſtent behaviour, that we are truly devoted to Him, and deſirous to do his whole will? Do we, then, abandon

* Heb. vi. 18. † Matt. vii. 20.

every wrong courſe, and pay a ſerious regard to every known duty, though tempted to tranſgreſs by general cuſtom, worldly convenience, or carnal inclination? Such, at leaſt, will be the caſe with real Chriſtians. After making all proper allowances for human infirmities and natural depravity, ſtill we muſt maintain, agreeably to St. John's declaration, that every man, who poſſeſſes the hope of the Goſpel, "purifieth himſelf, even as God is pure*." If any thing ſhort of this high attainment ſatisfy our conſciences, if there be any iniquity, which we determine to hold faſt, any kind or meaſure of holineſs, to which we do not aſpire, let us not preſume on our profeſſions: our religion is vain.

Though we are perſuaded that our outward conduct will ſtand the teſt, we ſhould examine likewiſe,

3. What are our motives and affections? This is a neceſſary ſcrutiny, in order to determine the nature of our obedience; ſince no action can be good, or acceptable before God, which ſprings not from a right principle. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart †." With reſpect, therefore, to formaliſts and hypocrites, "that which is highly eſteemed amongſt men, is abomination in the ſight of God ‡." The tremendous declaration ſhould put us upon ſearching our inward parts, however painful the taſk may be. Do we not there diſcover treachery and corruption? But let us enquire, whether the grace of God has ſubdued the depravity of our fallen nature, and implanted holy

* 1 John iii. 3. † 1 Sam. xvi. 7. ‡ Luke xvi. 15.

diſpoſitions.

dispositions. What is the end, which we propose to ourselves, in forming our habits, or regulating our conduct? Under what influence do we practise those things, which we know to be required? With what views do we frequent the divine ordinances? Are we actuated by an unfeigned regard to God? Whence proceed our honesty, temperance, and frugality? Are we in these respects serving God, or consulting our own interest and reputation? What disposes us to works of benevolence? Are we constrained by the love of Christ, and not induced by pride or fashion? The Apostolical direction is, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God *:" are we living by that exalted maxim? It is allowed, that eminent Christians experience a severe conflict from the corrupt desires of the flesh; but these they are enabled to resist. If carnal principles and tempers possess an habitual ascendency, it will avail us nothing, that we possess a fair character; our hearts are unsound, and what we boast of as duties, are rather to be put down in the list of transgressions, for which we should implore forgiveness. May He, "who searcheth the reins," enable us to pass a right judgment!

It may be useful to pursue the enquiries, which St. Paul has suggested, and to examine,

1. "Whether we be in the faith." It is not enough, that we assent to the truth of revelation in general, or maintain the whole system of Christian doctrines. If such an external profession had been

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

sufficient, the Apostle's exhortation to the Corinthians would have been unnecessary. But, alas! nominal believers, as we perceive in numerous instances, may be destitute of the true, saving knowledge of the Redeemer: and therefore we should ever be reminded, that "the form" without "the power of godliness" is unavailing. We must understand and feel the influence of our principles. It is of importance, that we "hold fast the form of sound words," and "contend earnestly for the faith:" but the Gospel requires more than mere speculative opinions. It commands us to possess a supreme regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of sinners, and an entire dependence upon him for all spiritual blessings. To be "in the faith," is to live in the habitual exercise of such a disposition towards Christ, expecting pardon, peace, holiness, and heaven, as the gift of his love, and as the purchase of the blood of his cross.

This is the distinguishing temper of a Christian, and is of all others most indispensably requisite. Without such an attachment to the Son of God, we must renounce our claim to the precious promises of the new Covenant: for they are given only to them that believe. Without it our best morality is essentially defective; and, however valuable it may be in society, it cannot be acceptable to God. The proper foundation being wanting, the superstructure will fail. Do we, then, feel that our warmest affections are placed upon the Saviour; and are we continually looking to him for renewed communications

of

of his grace? Do all our hopes centre in him; and do we derive from him, by fresh applications, increase of light, strength, and comfort? Can we adopt St. Paul's declaration, and say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me *?"

We should search still further, and enquire

2. Whether "Jesus Christ is in us." This doubtless implies, that we possess his temper and disposition: and such will be the effect of a right knowledge of his character, and dependence on his grace. Those, who "behold his glory, are changed into the same image †." They "have put on Christ ‡;" and "as He is, so are they in this world §." For this reason, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked ||." Let us seriously contemplate the perfect pattern of all righteousness, and "learn of him ⊥." We have seen many bright examples among the ancient saints; but their glory vanishes before the superior lustre of this splendid Luminary, as the stars before the sun. Have we been so struck with the view of his excellence, as to be filled with admiration, and transformed into a holy, suitable resemblance?

He was "meek and lowly in heart;" "sought not his own glory," and maintained an uninterrupted fervour of devotion and secret communion with God. He was "not of the world," but "separate from sinners," and yet touched with the tenderest com-

* Gal. ii. 20. † 2 Cor. iii. 18. ‡ Gal. iii. 27. § 1 John iv. 17. || 1 John ii. 6. ⊥ Matt. xi. 29.

passion for the miseries of mankind: he was merciful, patient, forgiving, and even prayed for his murderers. He yielded a perfect and cheerful obedience, and, through the ardour of his zeal, accounted it "his meat to do the will of Him that sent him, and to finish his work." Such was the Saviour: but is this the pattern, which we have proposed for our own imitation? If we have "received Christ Jesus the Lord," do we "walk in him *?" Is the same "mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus †?" Are we so conformed to him, that those, who look at us, may behold his likeness? How many, alas! are totally opposite! The proud, the covetous, the lustful, the profane, the sensual, the contentious, and revengeful, will not pretend, surely, that they are among the followers of the Lamb. May they feel a deep conviction of their guilt, and confess with godly sorrow, that they are entire strangers to the religion of the Gospel!

But, when the Apostle says to believers, "Jesus Christ is in you," the words imply more than a mere imitation or resemblance of his character. We may fairly infer from them, that his people are joined to him by the agency of the Spirit, and favoured with his gracious residence in their hearts. No man, indeed, attains a likeness of disposition to the Saviour, but "by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." This divine influence is the more to be insisted on, because it is denied by many, who boast of the sufficiency of their own unassisted strength. The proud advo-

* Col. ii. 6. † Phil. ii. 5.

cates

cates for what is improperly termed a rational ſyſtem of Theology, ſneer at the notion of a ſpiritual union with Chriſt, as if it exiſted only in the wild imaginations of enthuſiaſts. Let us, however, without dreading reproach, receive the doctrine on the authority of the inſpired writers, and pray with St. Paul, "that Chriſt may dwell in our hearts by faith *." Let us rejoice in thoſe kind aſſurances of our Redeemer; for they are big with conſolation: "He that eateth my fleſh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him †." "Behold, I ſtand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will ſup with him, and he with me ‡."

Believers, then, maintain a delightful intercourſe with their exalted Lord. He guides and conducts them in the way wherein they ſhould go: he ſtrengthens them with might for the work aſſigned them; he purifies them from their corruptions, for his ſervice and glory; and comforts them by decided tokens and clear manifeſtations of his love. Is this what we can teſtify from our own knowledge? Have we ſuch an evidence of true religion in our ſouls? Our doubts and apprehenſions ſhould excite us to greater earneſtneſs, in making and purſuing theſe enquiries: nor ſhould we reſt, till we perceive good reaſon to conclude, that "Chriſt is formed in us §." The precept, which requires us to examine ourſelves, implies, that it is poſſible to arrive at ſuch a concluſion,

* Eph. iii. 17. † John vi. 56. ‡ Rev. iii. 20. § Gal. iv. 19.

on ſatisfactory grounds. "Know ye not your own ſelves?" ſaid the Apoſtle. An ignorance of this kind, we obſerve, is ſpoken of as diſgraceful to Chriſtians. What will it avail us to be acquainted with the whole of "Scripture Characters?" The grand enquiry now is, and will be at the laſt, What is our own?

Is it thought, that the matter, here inſiſted on, is of trivial moment? It ſhould be recollected, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his *." It is alſo ſolemnly declared, that "Jeſus Chriſt is in you, EXCEPT YE BE REPROBATES †." The ſuppoſition is indeed alarming: yet let not the expreſſion be perverted. None are rejected of God, as "reprobates," or doomed to eternal miſery by an abſolute decree, without regard to the ſtate and diſpoſition of their hearts. We muſt however maintain, agreeably to this deſcription, that thoſe, who are "alienated from the life of God," cannot be acceptable to him: after much trial, they are diſapproved, like refuſe metal, which is ſo full of droſs as to be unfit for uſe; and therefore they are abandoned and finally caſt away. Who ſhall preſume to object to ſuch a procedure? Is it not conſiſtent with every principle of truth and equity? It is evident, that without a renovation of mind, through the influence of the Spirit, we muſt neceſſarily be excluded from the preſence of God for ever. O let us pray, that He would "make us

* Rom. viii. 9. † 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

meet

meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light * !"

We attempt not to deny or conceal the tremendous ſentence, " that " the wrath of God cometh upon the children of diſobedience †." But, " knowing the terror of the Lord, we perſuade men" to embrace the offers of his mercy. We ſolemnly warn them of impending deſtruction, and entreat them with earneſtneſs, not to trifle away their preſent opportunities. Through the whole of theſe practical reflections, we have endeavoured to keep in view the ſad caſe of impenitent ſinners, and engage their attention to the ſerious conſideration of their danger. And if any ſuch ſhould caſt their eyes upon theſe pages, we now again, in the concluſion, preſs them to examine themſelves, before they be ſummoned to that ſtrict and deciſive ſcrutiny at the judgment ſeat of Chriſt. Then indeed will every character be clearly diſcovered: we ſhall " diſcern between the righteous and the wicked ‡." But then alſo will the ſtate of every individual be determined beyond the poſſibility of a change. O give diligence, to flee from the wrath to come, and to obtain " inheritance among them which are ſanctified by faith, that is in Jeſus Chriſt § !"

It is preſumed, that many of our readers are among the faithful diſciples of the Saviour; and the ſubjects, here treated, ſeem eſpecially calculated to promote their edification and comfort. The writer will rejoice to be inſtrumental towards their ſpiritual advancement; and therefore, in a peculiar manner, he be-

* Col. i. 12. † Eph. v. 6. ‡ Mal. iii. 18. § Acts xxvi. 18.

ſpeaks

ſpeaks their attention. Poſſibly, you may be unnoticed and ſcorned in the midſt of a ſinful generation. But be encouraged to "hold on your way," in defiance of all difficulties and oppoſition. "The world knoweth you not, becauſe it knew not Him *," whom you ſerve. In this view, you will not complain of contemptuous treatment. Conſider, alſo, the examples of the moſt eminent ſaints. You are followers of them, who are now inheriting the promiſes. Their holy conduct will inſtruct you, their preſent happineſs will enliven your hopes.

Soon ſhall you be admitted to a ſtate of delightful intercourſe with thoſe exalted perſonages, whoſe characters you have been contemplating. You ſhall join with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, with Moſes and Elijah, with Peter, John, and Paul, in admiring and praiſing the God of your ſalvation. You ſhall come "to the general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born, which are written in heaven †," and unite with Angels and Archangels, as well as with the illuſtrious company of Martyrs, Prophets, and Apoſtles, in aſcribing "bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever ‡." Will not the proſpect ſupport and animate you, while you preſs forward with determined vigour? Let it be your great concern to recommend religion, both by your life and death. And may God grant, that he who writes and all who read theſe pages may be able to ſay with St. Paul, in the view of an approaching

* 1 John iii. 1. † Heb. xii. 23. ‡ Rev. v. 13.

diſſolution,

dissolution, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*!" Amen.

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

THE END.

INDEX

TO THE

TWO LAST VOLUMES.

The numeral Letters refer to the Volume, the Figures to the Page.

A.

B.

C.

D.

EVIL

E.

F.

H.

J.

L.

M.

N.

O.

P.

sent

A TABLE

Of the historical Passages in the New Testament,

Of which a Practical Improvement is given in the two last Volumes of this work, with a Reference to the Pages where they are introduced.

Matthew.	Mark.	Luke.	John.	Vol.	Page.
- -	- -	- -	i. 1-14	iii. iv.	30-35 321
- -	- -	i. 5-25 57-80	- -	iii.	5-8
- -	- -	26-56	- -	 iv.	46 229-231
18-25	- -	- -	- -	iii. iv.	47 233
1-17	- -	iii. 23-38	- -	iii.	48
- -	- -	ii. 1-20	- -	 iv.	49-53 233
- -	- -	21-39	- -	iii. iv.	54 234
ii. 1-12	- -	- -	- -	iii.	56
13-23	- -	- -	- -	 iv.	57 236
- -	- -	40-52	- -	iii. iv.	58 237
iii. 1-12	i. 1-11	iii. 1-18 21,22	- -	iii.	10-13
13-17	9-11	21,22	- -	-	65-68
- -	- -	- -	i. 15-36	-	13-14
iv. 1-11	12, 13	iv. 1-13	- -	-	69-80
- -	- -	- -	28-51	 iv.	83-87 265
- -	- -	- -	ii. 1-25	iii. iv.	88-98 238
- -	- -	- -	iii. 1-21	iii.	100-117
- -	- -	- -	26-36	-	14
- -	- -	- -	iv. 1-42	-	120-129
- -	- -	- -	43-54	-	130-132
- -	- -	14-30	- -	-	134-141
12-17 23-25 iii. 14-17	14, 15 21-39	31-44	- -	-	142-148
18-22	16-20	v. 1-11	- -	iii. iv.	149-151, 266
1-16	- -	- -	- -	iii.	152-167
17-48	- -	- -	- -	-	168-180
i. 1-34	- -	- -	- -	-	181-197
ii. 1-29	- -	- -	- -	-	198-213
iii. 1- 4	40-45	12 16	- -	-	215-218
x. 1- 8	ii. 1-12	17-26	- -	-	219-221
9	13,14	27,28	- -	-	222-223
10-17	15-22	29-39	- -	-	224-228
- -	- -	- -	v. 1-47	-	229-241
ii. 1- 8	23-28	vi. 1 5	- -	-	243-245
9- 21	iii. 1-12	6-11	- -	-	246-249
- -	13-19	12-49	- -	-	250-258
iii. 5-13	- -	vii. 1-10	- -	-	259-261
- -	19-21	11-17	- -	-	262-264

Matthew.		Mark.		Luke.		John.		Vol.	Page.
xi.	2-30	-	-	vii.	18-35	-	-	iii.	3, 12, 20 265-269
-	-	-	-		36-50	-	-	-	270-275
-	-	[illegible]		viii.	1- 3	-	-	-	276
xii.	22-32	iii.	22-30	xi.	14-23	-	-	-	278-284
	3[illegible]-50		31-35		24-36	-	-	 iv.	285-290 239,240
xiii.	1-23	iv.	1-25	viii.	4-18	-	-	iii.	293-298
	24-53		26-34	-	-	-	-	-	299-309
viii.	18-27		35-41	ix.	22-25 57-62	-	-	-	311-315
	28-34	v.	1-21	viii.	26-40	-	-	-	316-319
ix.	18-34		22-43		41-56	-	-	-	320-322
ix. xiii.	35-38 54	vi.	1-6	-	-	-	-	-	323-326
x. xi.	1-42 1		7-13	ix.	1- 6	-	-	-	327-341
xiv.	1-12		14-29	iii.	7- 9 19, 20	-	-	 iv.	18-22 326-338
	13-36		30-56	ix.	10-17	vi.	1-21	iii. iv.	342-348 268
-	-	-	-	-	-		22-71	iii. iv.	349-360 269
xv.	1-29	vii.	1-37	-	-	-	-	iii.	362-368
 xvi.	30-39 1-12	viii.	1-26	-	-	-	-		369-374
	13-28	 ix.	27-38 1		18-27	-	-	 iv.	375-379 270-272
xvii.	1-27		2-32		28-45	-	-	iii. iv.	381-389 273
xviii.	1-35		33-50		46-48	-	-	iii.	390-397
-	-	-	-		49-56	-	-	iv.	309
-	-	-	-	-	-	vii.	1-53	iii.	399-406
-	-	-	-	-	-	viii.	1-59	-	407-417
-	-	-	-	x.	1-42	-	-	-	419-429
-	-	-	-	xi.	1-13 37-42	-	-	-	430-436
-	-	-	-	xii.	1-59	-	-	-	437-446
-	-	-	-	xiii.	1-35	-	-	-	447-453
-	-	-	-	xiv.	1-35	-	-	-	454-462
-	-	-	-	xv.	1-32	-	-	-	463-470
-	-	-	-	xvi.	1-31	-	-	-	472-478
-	-	-	-	xvii.	1-37	-	-	-	479-484
-	-	-	-	xviii.	1-14	-	-	-	485-489
-	-	-	-	-	-	ix.	1-41	-	490-496
-	-	-	-	-	-	x.	1-42	-	497-506
xix.	1-30	x.	1-31	xviii.	15-30	-	-	-	507-517
xx.	1-34		32-52		31-43	-	-	 iv.	518-525 312
-	-	-	-	xix.	1-28	-	-	iii.	527-540
-	-	-	-	-	-	xi.	1-57	-	541-547
xxvi.	6-13	xiv.	3- 9	-	-	xii.	1-11	 iv.	548-551 248
xxi.	1-16	xi.	1-11		29-48		12-19	iii.	552-558
-	-	-	-	-	-		20-50	-	560-565
	17-46	 xii.	11-33 1-12	xx.	1-19	-	-	-	566-574
xxii.	1-14	-	-	-	-	-	-	iv.	2- 4
	15-46		13-37		20-44	-	-	-	5- 11
xxiii.	1-39		38-40		45-47	-	-	-	12- 18

Matthew.		Mark.		Luke.		John.		Vol.	Page.
xxiv.	1-51	xii. xiii.	41-44 1-37	xxi.	1-38	-	-		19- 35
xxv.	1-46	-	-	-	-	-	-		37- 52
xxvi.	1- 5 14 30	xiv.	1- 2 10-26	xxii.	1-38	xiii.	1-38		53- 68 248 254 274-280
-	-	-	-	-	-	xiv.	1-31	-	70- 77
-	-	-	-	-	-	xv.	1-27	-	78- 84
-	-	-	-	-	-	xvi.	1-33	-	86- 93
-	-	-	-	-	-	xvii.	1-26	-	94-102
	31-75		27 72		39-71	xviii.	1-27		105-120 254,278 314
xxvii.	1, 2, 11-35	xv.	1-24	xxiii.	1-33	xix.	28-40 1-18	-	123-138
	3-10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	256
	35-66		25-47		34-56		19-42	-	140-157
-	-	-	-	-	-		25-27	-	241,315
xxviii.	1-15	xvi.	1-14	xxiv.	1-43	xx.	1-23		162-177 316
	16-20		15-18		44-49	xxi.	24-29 1-23		179-194 282, 316
-	-		19, 20		50-53		24, 25	-	196-210

Acts.		Vol.	Page.	Acts.		Vol.	Page.	Galat.		Page.
i.	1-12	iv.	196	xii.	1-24	iv.	490-504	i.	17, &c.	iv. 374
	14		242		25		376	ii.	1-10	388,394
	18, 19, 25		257	xiii.	1-52		377-381		11-21	301,388
ii.	14-47		286	xiv.	1-28		382-386			
iii.	1-26		288-318	xv.	1-41		387-390			
iv.	1 37		289		6-11		300	Philem.		
v.	1-42		291	xvi.	1-40		393-399			
vi.	1-15		341-345	xvii.	1-34		400-406		1, &c.	506-519
vii.	1-60		345-350	xviii.	1-28		407-412			
viii.	14 25		294,318	xix.	1-41		415-419			
ix.	1- 3 1 22		360-370	xx. xxi.	1-38 1-40		420-424 425-428			
	23-30		374	xxii.	1-30		429-432			
	32-43		295	xxiii.	1-35		434-437			
x.	1-48		296 474-486	xxiv. xxv.	1-27 1-27		438-441 442-444			
xi.	1-18		298	xxvi.	1-32		445-450			
	25-30		376	xxvii.	1-44		453-457			
[illegible]	1-19		299	xxviii.	1-31		458-462			